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ABSTRACT

This document brings together relevant information on the topic of unsupported, homeless young people under 18 years of age. The stated purpose of the document is to identify policy directions which take account of the changing situations of many young people who are struggling to survive. Chapter 1 briefly outlines the background of the paper. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the reasons young people leave home and outlines some of the literature on early school leaving. Chapter 3 looks more broadly at issues of youth homelessness and reviews the literature in order to identify the major needs of unsupported, homeless youth. Chapter 4 outlines some of the major reports and reviews concerning young people in Australia in recent years and traces the development of Commonwealth government policies since 1983. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 examine Commonwealth provision in the areas of accommodation, income support, and education and training. Chapter 8 looks at groups with special needs, including young women, victims of sexual assault, non-English speaking persons, Aborigines, young people in rural and isolated areas, refugees, and young people with a history of institutionalization. Chapter 9 examines a number of issues concerning youth and independence and individual, family and community responsibility for young people. Chapter 10 looks at short-term and long-term strategies for unsupported, homeless youth. A six-page list of references is included. (ABL)

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On The Outside

The Needs of Unsupported, Homeless Youth

Frank Maas and Robyn Hartley

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Australian Institute of Family Studies

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Policy Background Papers

The Australian Institute of Family Studies is a Commonwealth Statutory Authority established under the *Family Law Act* 1975. The Institute, which began operations in February 1980, is a research and information dissemination organisation charged with conducting, encouraging and coordinating research into factors affecting marital and family stability in Australia. A major focus of its research program is the impact of public policies on the wellbeing of families.

The Policy Background Paper series is aimed at raising the level of public debate about policy areas affecting families in Australia. At times they will be commissioned papers written by leading experts in each field; at others, they will be papers developed within the Institute in an effort to identify areas in need of further research and action.

The Institute hopes the Policy Background Paper series will contribute to a better understanding of the importance of a 'family perspective' in the development of policy. Papers in the series describe current arrangements in Australia, examine issues that arise as a result of their operation and canvass alternative policy options. These discussions of important policy areas do not necessarily advocate any one particular set of policy prescriptions. They are presented as contributions to informed debate and as reference points for those who wish either to contribute to or simply observe and understand the process of developing family policies.

Titles in the **Policy Background Paper** series are:

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No.2 Towards a national child care policy
No.3 Marriage counselling services: priorities and policy
No.4 Children in stepfamilies: their legal and family status
No.5 Should families be a focus for policies?
No.6 Human relations education in Australian schools: a review of policies and practices
No.7 On the outside: the needs of unsupported, homeless youth

Copies of the above papers are available from the Distribution Officer, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 300 Queen Street, Melbourne 3000 Victoria, Australia. Telephone (03) 608 6888

Contributors

This Policy Background Paper is based on two recent studies by staff of the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

In 1985–86 Frank Maas planned, coordinated and authored a report on the needs of unsupported students. Sue Girling-Butcher was the research officer for the project and contributed substantially to the writing of several chapters.

In 1987, Frank Maas and Robyn Hartley produced a report on the implementation of the Young Homeless Allowance. Frank Maas directed the project, Robyn Hartley analysed case studies of applicants for the Allowance and both contributed to the writing of the report. Collection of the case study material was initiated by the National Youth Coalition for Housing; Michele O'Neil and Alia Dann from that organisation critically commented on drafts of the report.

Robyn Hartley and Frank Maas then updated and extended the two original reports for an amalgamated presentation in the present Policy Background Paper. Don Edgar, Peter McDonald, Gay Ochiltree and David Keane commented on drafts of both the original reports and the current paper.

The paper was edited and prepared for publication by Meredith Michie.

Foreword

The Australian Institute of Family Studies believes that this Policy Background Paper is timely. The launching of the Government's Priority One campaign in 1985 brought youth policy issues temporarily to the fore; in the intervening years, however, youth issues faded from prominence and much of the initiative seemed to be lost.

Recently, more hopeful signs of an integrated look at support programs for youth have emerged. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness and its final report have generated much concern, and Ministers whose portfolios overlap on youth issues are calling for a critical evaluation of how current schemes are operating.

In this Institute's view, only a coordinated policy approach which is fully aware of the altered structural circumstances of young people in Australia has any hope of success in meeting youth needs and providing a positive future for them. The pressures facing young people result from an unprecedented period of rapid change affecting all Australians. In that context, youth issues should be seen as a central part of family policy. Youth policy cannot sit aside from family policies, nor can solutions be found which ignore the integral links between family, education and work via that central task of parenting, of bringing our children towards competent adulthood.

It is relatively easy to catalogue the nature of those social changes affecting youth. The period of post-war affluence which saw the marriage/baby booms and virtually full employment is over. Unemployment is now widespread and accepted by some as a permanent feature of Australian society. Close to 20 per cent of 15–19 year-olds are unemployed and the average duration out of work is over 40 weeks. Young people are thus caught in a time of structural change, which takes away all but the least attractive jobs, leaving them in the Catch 22 situation of having no 'experience' to qualify them for a job and being unable to get a job that will give them experience. In other words, their transition to adulthood is out of joint.

Yet, we continue to blame the victims and foolishly assume they are at fault for not doing what was 'normal' for older generations — that is, get a job, get married, leave home and 'settle down' properly.

Moreover, changes in family structure make it impossible to assume that all parents are in a position to 'launch' youth into independent adulthood. Higher divorce rates, the poverty of one-parent families and the complexities of parental responsibilities in remarriages, all seem to bear down on youth who 'should' be out fending for themselves. Family conflict, youth homelessness, low self-esteem and despair are closely intertwined, so earlier assumptions about parental support through these years of transition must be challenged. We offer few supports for families on the central task of parenting. The family has become a private battleground, children are seen as a private cost, not a public asset, and young people are left to their own devices, with no 'place' in society that is meaningful.

Indeed, we have created an extended period of 'youth' to replace 'adolescence'. It ranges now from about age 12 to age 25 years, a period in which the contradictions of economic dependency and emotional independence create stresses for both youth and their parents.

Our institutional structures for this period of youth have not kept pace. Schools are still designed more for academically-minded children than for mature sexual beings, whose interest may not be academic at all. Resistance to authority has achieved widespread cultural acceptability and permeates an outmoded approach to discipline and responsibility. Credentialling is rampant, so that the competition gets fiercer the longer students are 'retained' in school. Retention rates are quoted as signs of 'progress', rather than looking closely at the effectiveness of existing curricula or the actual outcomes of retention for those not making the grade.

Broadly, our culture values diversity and choice, but offers few guidelines for the young who are bewildered by choice. As Manning Clark puts it, 'we live in an age of doubt about everything'. A culture of materialism, competition and violence devalues affection, caring, consideration for others, cooperation and sharing. Our economic planners tend to forget the human face behind 'recovery' and show little understanding that those who have to wait for the 'trickle-down' effect may not survive. Small wonder that our future adults are so confused, especially when we present (via the media) a vision of the future that is even gloomier than the present. With nothing to aim for, it is little wonder that many young people live the present in a frenzied, nihilistic way.

I would suggest that we, as a society, have been failing our youth in increasing numbers. The young people who are the focus of this Policy Background Paper are facing the future without the resources to survive in a complex society, without a sense of being valued in their own right, without skills that are valued, without the interpersonal skills necessary to cope with life's transitions and adult personal relationships, and without much hope that they can control the future via their own active initiative.

However, if we focus only on the negative we exacerbate the problem. Our message must be, instead, that there *is* hope, that everyone *can* have an impact, that every child is not only valued but also *needed* by the rest of society. And the main pathway to feeling needed is to structure our families, our schools, our communities so that youth can, and are *expected to*, contribute meaningfully to the wellbeing of others.

The Institute's broader research on youth and family life shows that young people have higher self-esteem and are more competent when their

parents combine two approaches to their offspring. A gradual increase in autonomy, greater freedom to exercise their own judgement is crucial. But a parallel insistence that adolescents contribute regularly to some tasks upon which the whole family relies adds to their positive development. The combined message from parents is 'You're capable and we trust you', plus 'You're important to the whole family, we rely on you to function properly as a social unit'. Too many parents, teachers and policy makers fail to make clear to young people that they are needed and have responsibilities to others in the community.

Too much focus on the personal aspect of young people, on their 'needs' as opposed to what they can *do* for others (and in so doing, for themselves) will worsen the situation. We must re-surround youth, create a new place in society for them that relates to others, rather than continue to push them into a youth ghetto open to exploitation by drug pushers and others.

This Policy Background Paper focuses on those young people who have not had the benefit of benign processes, either at home or at school. They are 'unsupported', the most polite term available for adolescents who have been pushed out of home, or whose parents have no resources to help, and for whom the formal systems of government income support are inadequate, even downright damaging.

As the authors, Frank Maas and Robyn Hartley, correctly point out, such youth represent a form of 'family breakdown' often forgotten in discussions of marital separation and divorce. It is the breakdown of parent–child relationships. But as they also document, the plight of these youngsters reflects a wider social failure to adjust policies to meet the structural changes affecting youth.

Many schemes have been devised to 'build youth back into the system'. CYSS programs have been varied in style and success. In Western Australia, the Westrek program takes unemployed youth out of their current context of despair, teaches them new skills in a supportive and challenging program and launches them into a new, more positive lifestyle. In Victoria, a new pilot called the Good Neighbourhood Program builds on the links between old and young; this reverses the usual adult-to-youth flow of assistance, giving a sense of control and responsibility for others to young people in the community.

I have written about a positive approach to youth in this Foreword, because the report itself shows how negative are so many of our current youth policies. New and optimistic directions are needed. Above all, we must create new tasks for youth, preferably tasks that are social, people-oriented and which make a meaningful contribution to society. Since the two age groups most dramatically caught by rapid change in family structures are youth and the aged, any program which brings them together creatively should be welcomed.

Drawing on the experience and wisdom of our seniors, plus the enthusiasm and creativity of our youth, we might build an Australian version of the 'Peace Corps' of the Kennedy years. This would be a 'Youth Care Corps' which developed service jobs for our young people, at the same time meeting the rapidly increasing care and service needs of the community. Not just the aged, but also young couples in need of child care, play groups, family support centres and the vast network of non-government community organi-

sations could benefit. The point of service/care work is that it gives direct and positive feedback to the provider, unlike the dead-end tasks of manual 'fix-it' jobs. It provides human contact out of which can grow mutual understanding and a valuing of cooperation. If we used unemployment benefits and other payments to teach young people the coping skills they lack, perhaps a more positive place, a less bleak future could be provided.

That sort of mutuality, reciprocity, recognition of work and of the community's need for positive input from the young may be the only solution to the alienation of youth our society has created. It does not focus only on the 'problems' of youth, but rather on the strengths of youth. Its message is one of inclusion, optimism, value. In my view, that message has to start very young, in every home and adult–child contact; but it's never to late to make a new start.

Don Edgar
Director
Australian Institute of Family Studies

Summary of Findings

The aim of this Policy Background Paper on unsupported, homeless young people aged under 18 years, is to bring together relevant information from a number of areas in order to identify policy directions which take account of the changing situations of many young people who are struggling to survive.

Chapter 1 briefly outlines the background to the paper. The decision to produce such a paper results from recent work by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in two related areas of youth policy — a report on the needs of unsupported students of secondary school age and a study of the implementation of the Young Homeless Allowance.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the reasons why young people leave home and outlines some of the literature on early school leaving. It looks particularly at changing patterns and circumstances for those who leave home at an early age and explores some of the interactions between these and early school leaving. It concludes that while circumstances for individual young people are inevitably complex, family conflict, abusive family relationships, desire for independence and the effects of economic hardship and unemployment are well established as reasons for young people leaving home at an early age in the 1980s, and for some result in lack of support and homelessness. These factors are sometimes closely interwoven and relate to early school leaving.

Chapter 3 looks more broadly at issues of youth homelessness and reviews the literature in order to identify the major needs of unsupported, homeless young people, under the headings of accommodation, income support and other support services. Suggestions from the literature are outlined, with a focus on the need to consider a wide range of provision in each of the areas so that individual needs are met.

Chapter 4 outlines some of the major reports and reviews concerning young people in Australia in recent years and traces the development of Commonwealth government policies since 1983. It concludes that while there is now more emphasis on, and awareness of youth issues than previously, much still needs to be done in the area of unsupported, homeless youth. The following trends are noted: a strong emphasis on policies aimed at encouraging more young people into education and training, and a shift

in emphasis from job creation to job training. While there has been acceptance by the Commonwealth of some financial responsibility for a small number of young people under the age of 18 years living independently of their families, there are also developments which place the responsibility for young people firmly back on the family, leaving many unsupported, homeless young people in a parlous state.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 examine current Commonwealth provision in the areas of, respectively, accommodation, income support, and education and training.

Chapter 8 explores the special needs of particular groups of young people who are not being serviced by existing policies and provision, and argues for a greater range of services and approaches to cater for individual needs.

Chapter 9 examines a number of issues concerning youth independence and individual, family and community responsibility for young people. It argues that both government and the community need to address these issues if appropriate policies and strategies are to be developed. At present, there appear to be contradictions in policies and confusion in the apportioning of responsibility which result in some young people being totally without support from any source, or with extremely inadequate resources to survive.

Chapter 10 looks at short-term and long-term strategies for unsupported, homeless youth. The short-term strategies refer to recommended changes to the Young Homeless Allowance, and to other income and support services for young people. The long-term strategies look at the conditions which contribute to young people being bereft of family and community support: a range of approaches is suggested, including policies which give youth a more valued social role, provide a much wider range of accommodation options for families and for young people, give support to families both financially and in negotiating the changed circumstances under which many young people now gain their independence, and which recognise the rights of young people.

1. Background

The Australian Institute of Family Studies has long been concerned with the relationships between families and the developing competence of young people, and with the effects of changes in the composition of families, including family disruption or breakdown, on young people's lives. It has monitored developments in the youth policy area, in particular those concerned with support for young people during the transition period from childhood to adulthood.

In 1985 the then Commonwealth Department of Education commissioned the Institute to undertake a study of the needs of unsupported students. The Department and the Office of Youth Affairs were concerned about the effects of lack of support on the schooling of young people and wished to find effective means of helping those who wish to do so to continue their secondary education.

At the time, Commonwealth policy makers were re-drafting a wide range of programs for young people. Information about numbers of unsupported students and their particular problems was very sketchy. However, it was recognised that several factors had combined to produce an increase in the numbers of young people still at school, or of school age, who were without the support normally expected from families. Social and economic changes had contributed to increased rates of family disintegration, youth unemployment and family poverty. Additionally, large numbers of Indo-Chinese refugee youth, especially those without families to support them, were finding it difficult to cope with resettlement in Australia.

The Institute report which resulted from the Commonwealth request, entitled 'On the outside: assessment of the needs of unsupported students' (Maas, 1986), reviewed the available literature and reported on information gathered from Commonwealth government agencies, State government departments, youth refuges, schools and non-government organisations.

In July 1986, the Commonwealth government introduced the Young Homeless Allowance, an income support measure for 16–17 year-olds which was one of a number of changes to youth allowances. In mid-1987 the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH), which was undertaking a project on the Young Homeless Allowance, approached the Insti-

tute for advice on analysing case studies which examined the experiences of homeless young people in their attempts to obtain the Allowance. Since the interests of both organisations coincided, it was agreed that a report be prepared by the Institute in conjunction with NYCH. The Institute looked at the information gathered by youth workers on 180 young people who had applied for the Young Homeless Allowance. This included details of young people's family circumstances, the grounds on which they had applied, their experiences with various Commonwealth and State departments, and the result of their application. The resulting paper critically reviewed the implementation of the Young Homeless Allowance, argued for an extension of the eligibility criteria and outlined both short-term and long-term policy issues (Maas and Hartley, 1987). A separate set of recommendations regarding the future operation of the Young Homeless Allowance was prepared by NYCH using the report as a background source (NYCH, 1988).

Both of the Institute reports, on unsupported students and on the Young Homeless Allowance, were written for particular purposes and have not been widely distributed beyond those with an immediate interest in policies relevant to the issues raised. However, the Institute believes that the problems experienced by unsupported youth raise major questions for consideration, not only by policy makers but by the community generally. These include questions of relative responsibility of parents, the community and governments for unsupported youth, and how best to provide support for those who need it. Given the importance of these issues, it was decided to update and bring together in one paper the information gathered and to extend the issues raised in both reports.

This Policy Background Paper is concerned with Commonwealth government policy and provision of services for young people under 18 years of age who are not supported, or only very minimally supported, by their family of origin and who do not have access to relatively permanent, affordable and appropriate accommodation. Such young people may be at school or in some other educational institution, unemployed or receiving a very low income from part-time or even full-time employment. The report pays special attention to school students, a group which has been relatively neglected in general discussions of youth homelessness.

Discussion is restricted to Commonwealth initiatives because of the crucial role which Commonwealth directions and funding play in the youth policy arena and because detailed analysis of various State provisions was beyond our resources. In any event, it is often only after Commonwealth funding initiatives that States are asked to match federal funding.

2. Leaving Home and Leaving School

Teenage years are traditionally years of transition in a number of areas — from childhood to adulthood, from school to the world of employment, from a focus on the family where one was born to a focus on groupings and partnerships which may eventually lead to being a parent oneself, from living in the parental home to establishing a home of one's own. In fact, the major task of adolescence, at least in contemporary Western society, is to move from dependence on family to independence, which in the great majority of cases means 'leaving home'.

There has never been a way of making these transitions which has been valid for everyone: there have certainly always been variations according to class and to gender. Teenagers from working class families have generally had an earlier transition into the world of work and as a consequence perhaps a quicker transition from childhood to adulthood and its many responsibilities than young people from middle class families who have remained longer in education. There are and probably always have been differences between the comparative ages of leaving home for young women and young men. Males have tended to leave home later, females have tended to leave home earlier, to marry or form new families at a younger age than young males have done. In addition, general patterns of leaving home have changed over time.

At present, unemployment, unstable economic conditions and the high cost of housing make the transition to independence difficult for many young people. For a significant minority, however, leaving home is essentially a bid for economic and psychological *survival* rather than a thought-out, though perhaps financially risky, step towards independence. This group is a cause for great concern.

'Homelessness' and lack of family support for young people are not simply the result of leaving home at too early an age or with inadequate resources to survive. Individual homelessness results from decisions (by others) which mean that there is insufficient affordable housing available, and/or from lack of access to reasonable levels of income. The National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) sees youth homelessness as multi-faceted and resulting from interaction between a number of elements includ-

ing social and economic factors, the state of the public housing sector, the state of the private housing sector and the lack of recognition of the rights of young people (NYCH, 1983). Nevertheless, the circumstances under which young people leave home are an important element in the overall move to independence and need to be understood if appropriate policies concerning unsupported young people are to be developed.

This chapter examines patterns of young people leaving home, patterns of early school leaving, and some interactions between the two.

Reasons for Leaving Home

A study on youth housing policy which looked at the needs of young homeless people in the outer eastern region of Melbourne commented:

> The experiences of the young people who took part in [the] study suggest that a single cause of leaving home is rare — more often a number of factors operate, and in most cases where a single cause can be identified as precipitating the act of leaving (such as a major fight with parents) this is merely the culmination of a series of increasing tensions or influences . . . From the interviews, it seems to us that the causes of leaving home can be considered under the following headings: desire for independence, family conflict, family fragmentation, family reconstitution, personal abuse, looking for work, release from institution and eviction and breakdown of relationships. Many of these are related, and few (if any) act independently of the others. (Low, Crawshaw and Mathews, 1984:57)

The comment highlights the complexity of factors which lead some young people to leave home — factors which suggest the fundamental importance of a changing social and economic climate.

The following discussion summarises studies concerning young people leaving home. Included is information from the Institute's study of the implementation of the Young Homeless Allowance (Maas and Hartley, 1987) which focuses on the experiences of those under the age of 18 years who leave home without support, or with very minimal support, from their family.

Changing patterns of young people leaving home

Research indicates that the reasons young people leave home have changed over the past decade or so, especially for those leaving home at an early age. Data collected for the Institute's Australian Family Formation Study (Edgar and Maas, 1984) show that, compared with those who left home at early ages a decade before, those who left in the early 1980s were more likely to leave because of family conflict, especially males, and more likely to leave because of a desire to be independent, especially females; they were less likely to leave to get married, especially females, and less likely to leave in order to take up or look for work, possibly reflecting reduced employment opportunities.

Further analysing data in this study, Young (1984) found that leaving school early is usually associated with leaving home at a young age. She contrasts the high proportion of early school leavers who are now leaving home for independence with the situation in 1971 when, as Young maintains, independence was common only among those with higher levels of schooling.

Young also identified a pattern of leaving home, returning and leaving again. This pattern was more pronounced for those who first left at a young age, and for males than for females. The most common reason for returning home was 'convenience', while financial reasons and personal factors such as loneliness and illness were also important. These financial and personal problems were mainly associated with those who first left because of family conflict or to be independent. Ironically, those who were most likely to return home were also those who had left against a background of parental hostility. The pattern which emerges for this group is that the young person leaves home partly because of conflict, is forced to return home because of financial and personal difficulties, and leaves again because of further family conflict.

In a further analysis, Young found no evidence of a major shift between 1971 and 1982 in the average age at which young people finally left home: 'The final [age of] departure from home has remained relatively stable' (Young, 1987:35). This does not seem to accord with stories of very young people living on the streets, nor with the fact that the average age of youth accommodation service users appears to have dropped in the 1980s. Available data indicate that many of these young people do not return home. Once they have been in a refuge for more than one period, the likelihood of returning to live with parents is reduced (Schwager, 1988).

Information provided by Kilmartin (1987) in her analysis of data between 1981–1986 indicates that increasing numbers of both 15–19 year-olds and 20–24 year-olds of both sexes are living at home with parents, and that males in both groups are more likely than females to live at home. During the period, there was a steady increase of both male and female full-time students aged 15–19 years living at home and, in the same age group, a greater number of employed than unemployed young people living at home. This suggests that any general trends concerning shifts in the average age at which young people leave home almost certainly obscure differences in leaving home patterns which are related to educational and labour force status.

In the following discussion, research on the circumstances under which young people leave home is outlined under a number of headings. However as noted earlier, the decision by young people to go it alone is often the result of a number of factors.

Family conflict

Family conflict features strongly in most studies of young people leaving home, especially for those most at risk of becoming homeless. While this may well indicate that young people in families, and families generally, are facing increasing pressures, 'family conflict' can become a catch-all term covering a variety of situations.

Family conflict emerged as an important precursor to leaving home in *One Step Forward*, the report of the National Committee for Evaluation of the Youth Services Scheme (1983), which indicated that of those young people in youth accommodation whose last permanent residence was with the family, 78 per cent had experienced some form of conflict. For under 16 year-olds, the figures were 86 per cent of males and 89 per cent of females.

These findings echoed State monitoring reports produced before the national evaluation and have been confirmed in individual research studies undertaken in recent years. For instance, the New South Wales monitoring report listed family conflict as the main reason for young people leaving home in nearly 52 per cent of cases, and household breakdown in 29.9 per cent (Gilbert, 1982). A 1983 survey of young people found that 61 per cent of the sample had left home because of family conflict, including 18 per cent who had clashed with step-parents (Hancock and Burke, 1983).

Australian Institute of Family Studies data also show that conflict, as a reason for first leaving home, has increased dramatically over the period 1971 to 1981, especially for those under 18 years of age (Edgar and Maas, 1984). This research also shows that leaving home at an early age because of conflict was closely associated with early school leaving age, particularly for females. The Committee of Inquiry into Homelessness in the Australian Capital Territory and Surrounding Regions (1984) reported on a survey undertaken by a secondary college in Canberra. Of 127 students identified as homeless during 1982, most had experienced difficulties in coping with family breakdown or had clashed with family members, girls being more affected than boys.

Analysing Australian Institute of Family Studies data, Young (1984, 1987) found that significant factors associated with leaving home because of conflict included unemployment (of males), having an unemployed father, having a step-parent, and lack of closeness to parents. Leaving home was associated with a strong negative reaction from parents and a low incidence of contact after leaving.

The family background of young people included in nearly all of the surveys of youth refuges and shelters features a high proportion of youth from families where parents had repartnered or where divorce or separation had occurred. While to date no studies have adequately explored explanations of these observations in a way that disentangles other factors (such as the income of the families), some data lend support to the view that both adults and young people in non-intact families find it more difficult to cope with family problems than do those in intact families.

This is not to argue that similar problems do not exist in intact families. Over 50 per cent of homeless young people come from intact families and the spate of books on 'how to live with your teenage child' and 'how to cope with your parents while you are a teenager', indicate that conflict between parents and young adults is widespread and 'normal'. Nor is it to argue that all non-intact families experience greater conflict or other difficulties than intact families. The proposition is that there may be periods of difficulty associated with changing family forms not experienced in intact families, and that these could generate extra pressures which may in turn lead to teenagers not being able to cope and consequently leaving home.

There are indications in recent Institute research that greater pressures do exist in families characterised by dissolution and reformation. In its Australian Family Formation study it was found that by age 17, 26 per cent of young people where both natural parents were present had left home compared with 45 per cent of those where parents had separated and remained single, or repartnered (Edgar and Maas, 1984). There is also evidence that many children experience problems at the time of their parents' separation

and when a parent, particularly a mother, repartners (Amato, 1987). Although the initial instability and conflict often associated with family breakdown can change over time, it can also crucially affect the timing of young people's leaving home.

Family conflict experienced by applicants for the Young Homeless Allowance

As outlined in Chapter 1, a study of young people applying for the Young Homeless Allowance was conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (Maas and Hartley, 1987). This study incorporated case study material gathered by the National Youth Coalition for Housing, including numerous examples of young people who had left home because of 'extreme domestic disharmony'. The term refers to a range of circumstances in which young people experienced major family conflicts and a consequent breakdown in family relationships. These were variously described as 'intolerable', 'unbearable', and 'hopeless' situations for young people. Consistent with the research on conflict previously outlined, there were three recurring themes underlying conflict which led to extreme domestic disharmony.

- *Repartnering of parents* The first of these was associated with the repartnering of one of the parents. Readjustments are always required in such situations, with old relationships being disturbed and new ones, about which the young person may have little or no choice, having to be established with an adult and, in many cases, with children. Some young people were, however, in situations unlikely to 'settle down' or to be resolved in a way conducive to them remaining at home. There were instances of extreme hostility between the parent's new partner and the young person, with the young person subject to constant verbal abuse, denigration or threats of physical violence. While both female and male applicants for the Young Homeless Allowance were in such situations, relationships between young women and the mother's new partner tended to be the most volatile. There were also cases where repartnering of parents meant drastically altered living conditions which affected the psychological wellbeing, self-concept and future life of teenage children. Conflicts arising from the repartnering of one (or occasionally both) parents were sometimes compounded by other factors such as unemployment and poor living conditions.
- *Value differences* Other instances of extreme domestic disharmony were caused by political and religious differences between parents and children, parents' expectations about appropriate behaviour for young women, parents' emphasis on the need for family solidarity and the supremacy of family values over school and peer values. Young's (1987) research indicated that single specific instances or repeated instances of the same thing as the main cause of conflict were much rarer than conflict over a broad range of issues, usually with both parents. For example, 'conflict with both parents' was cited in 41 per cent of cases involving youth leaving home because of conflict, compared with only 10 per cent because of disagreement about social life or peers, and 9 per cent over arguments concerning alcohol. The Institute study supports this contention. There were indications that conflict tended to be over what could be seen as major issues rather than over particular behaviour on the part of the young person, such as coming home late at night.

• *Cultural value differences* Some instances of extreme domestic disharmony were related to value clashes between parents and young people from a non-English-speaking background. The nature of a breakdown in relationships between parents and children has some similarities across cultures, but the factors which precipitate the breakdown, the responses of parents and young people, and the meaning and implications of such a breakdown are likely to vary across cultures. The examples from the Institute study of young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds leaving home were consistent with Rosenthal's (1984) finding that the greatest family conflict occurred not where young people were finding it difficult to deal with two normative systems of behaviour, but where they had adopted, or were wanting to adopt, the attitudes and behaviour of their Anglo–Australian peers while their parents held to traditional ways. There was evidence that in some families, there is very strong rejection by parent(s) of a young person for unacceptable attitudes or behaviour. While pointing out the difficulties and dangers of making generalisations, Cahill and Ewen (1987:31) conclude that when things do go wrong between parents and children from non-English-speaking backgrounds there are instances of major and traumatic breakdowns 'where solutions are more intractable because the strength of the family-centred values creates all-or-nothing situations'. Thus a young person can find him or herself not only without any supports from family and relatives but actively shunned. The Institute study included examples of such situations.

Escape from violence and/or sexual abuse

Young people leave home in order to escape situations of violence, including rape and sexual abuse. It is overwhelmingly young women who are victims of sexual abuse. Unfortunately, it is also the case that, for a variety of reasons, many young people remain in families where they are the victims of violence, including sexual abuse. Again, it is young women who are most likely to be in this situation.

Attempting to estimate the number of young women who leave home because of sexual abuse is difficult. Because many refuges do not adequately cater for young women, there is a tendency for young women to be reluctant to approach refuges. This means that they are not necessarily included in surveys of supported accommodation. For a variety of reasons including guilt, shame, lack of information about what to do, fear and desire to protect family members, many young women keep their experiences a secret. In the Institute study, youth workers reported that some young women are well aware that young females are much more likely than young males to be institutionalised under 'care and protection' or 'at risk' provisions (Winlaton Deinstitutionalisation Working Party, 1986). They are reluctant to report sexual abuse within the family because they believe, with good reason, that they may be taken into care by State welfare authorities.

A small number of accommodation services are set up specifically for incest and rape victims. However, surveys of young people in general shelter accommodation indicate that there are significant numbers of young women who have come from families where various forms of violence are common.

For example, a survey in New South Wales found that of 100 young women interviewed in youth refuges, 31 were incest survivors and 18 mentioned some form of sexual assault; 79 had experienced physical or emotional violence and 69 of these mentioned the father as the perpetrator (NSW, 1986). There are few support services for such young women who are often left to cope by themselves with problems of guilt and alienation.

Desire for independence

Much of the conflict associated with patterns of leaving home is to do with young people exerting normal pressures to enable them to become more independent of their parents. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, establishing independence from parents is considered to be one of the major tasks of adolescence, and indeed many psychologists see failure to accomplish some degree of independence in adolescence as cause for concern. Australian Institute of Family Studies research has shown that for young people to develop high levels of personal and social competence, the family environment needs to encourage independence through fostering autonomy and responsibility (Edgar and Maas, 1984).

The shift to independence can be a painful time for both parents and young people. Young (1987) found that some young people who left home because of a desire for independence were reacting against a very restrictive family environment. Those who were encouraged by parents to be independent tended to leave home later and for reasons other than independence or conflict. Again, Young found that parents whose children left home against a background of restrictions on their independence were more likely than other parents to have negative reactions to their children leaving home, and the young people were less likely to maintain contact after leaving.

Particular difficulties can occur when the process of gaining independence is hindered by dramatic clashes of values, as is sometimes the case in families from cultural backgrounds different from that of contemporary Australia or, as noted above, when it occurs against a background of significant change (such as divorce or repartnering) in the lives of the parents.

In her study of the financial arrangements between parents and TAFE students, Powles (1986) found that young people often left home because of conflict over control of finances, or planned to leave because of feelings of psychological and financial control by parents. They saw such restrictions as 'a foil to their developing expressions of adult identity' (p.68).

Many (perhaps most) families experience some conflict as young people move towards independence. However, where a young person's desire for independence and/or conflict leads to leaving home at an early age, it is apparent that processes which in other circumstances result in the successful development of autonomy and a continued mutually beneficial relationship with parents, have either broken down or not eventuated.

Low family income and unemployment

While personal and individual factors are important, youth homelessness is not only, or even primarily, a consequence of the failure of individuals in families to get along. There are other forces outside the control of the individual and the family.

One of the main factors is the experience of low income and the incidence of unemployment. Young (1987) showed that compared with those who had never been unemployed, those who *had* been unemployed were more likely to have ever left home, were younger at first leaving, were more likely to have left because of conflict and had a more negative parental reaction. Parental unemployment was also associated with leaving home because of conflict or a desire for independence.

Analysis of a recent longitudinal survey of young people shows that unemployed 16 and 17 year-olds are much more likely to leave home than those not unemployed (Maas, 1987b). Other research has shown that unemployed youth are more likely to come from low income families (Bradbury, Garde and Vipond, 1986; Frey, 1986).

Financial circumstances

The often hidden supports of living at home generally mean that a young person is economically better off at home than living away from home. However, in families under severe economic stress, the implications of living at home are complex and can eventually lead young people to leave. The costs associated with rearing teenage children are considerable. Recent Australian Institute of Family Studies figures on the cost of children, based on Lovering (1984) and updated to the March 1988 CPI, show that for a low income family (that is, a family with a below average weekly wage) the weekly cost of a teenager is $57.35, and for a middle income family (average weekly wage and above) $95.41. The figures do not include costs for housing, transport, school fees or uniforms, medical or dental expenses. Current rates for the Job Search Allowance — the benefit available for 16–17 year-old unemployed youth — are $50 for children from low income families and a minimum of $25 for children from other than low income families. This leaves a gap for families to cover, especially as the costs of looking for work are also not included in this analysis.

Family dynamics associated with low income and youth unemployment can create situations of high conflict which, as has been demonstrated, is a major reason for young people leaving home. This was evident in a number of the case studies examined in the Institute's report on the Young Homeless Allowance. A study of youth incomes and living costs conducted by the Developmental Youth Services Association (1988) in New South Wales confirms the tendency for young unemployed people to leave home. This survey also found a strong link between family conflict and youth unemployment, with conflicts with parents arising over general life style, over behaviour such as stealing and involvement with the selling of drugs which some resort to in order to make ends meet. Many of the young people in the survey were receiving no financial support from parents to supplement their unemployment benefit, some were receiving very limited material support, and others were paying a substantial part of their unemployment benefit in the form of board.

Having money of one's own is important to young people for reasons other than that of sheer survival. First, it is necessary in order to find work, the costs of which are not always realised. Second, it helps to establish and maintain self-esteem and negotiating power towards an adult role in the

family. When the young person has to use what little money he or she has to supplement family finances, conflict concerning this, disillusionment at not having any independent means, or guilt about being a burden on family finances, can result. In the Institute study there were instances of young people handing over, or being required to hand over, most (in some cases all) of their unemployment benefit as their contribution to the support of the family as a whole. This is not to suggest that young people should make no contribution to family expenses, but to indicate that the financial stress on some families results in young people leaving home.

Low family income and unemployment may result in precarious family situations where any further pressure is enough to make the situation untenable for a young person — for example, the temporary mental breakdown and hospitalisation of a parent, or the birth of another child. It is not surprising that some young people choose to leave home in the circumstances mentioned above in order to relieve the family of the burden of their upkeep, or because they are prevented from being able to exercise any meaningful independent role, or because the stresses of living in the family become too great.

Although the previous disparity between the allowance for students (Austudy) and unemployment benefit, at least for youth from low income families, was removed at the beginning of 1988, there are indications that new arrangements originally announced in the Federal government's May 1987 Economic Statement are causing further pressures on many low income and middle income families. The abolition of any support for unemployed youth for 13 weeks after leaving the education system and the payment of a Job Search Allowance of only $25 per week after that time to youth from families on other than low incomes, could well exacerbate family conflicts and hence lead to increased youth homelessness (Maas, 1987b). In the case of low income families where a young person studying is eligible for $50 per week under Austudy, a decision to leave school causes severe hardship for the family if no job is forthcoming. For 13 weeks the family has to support a young unemployed person totally, perhaps setting into train the pattern of conflict and leaving home that has become associated with so much youth homelessness.

For middle income families not eligible for Austudy, the change in status from student to unemployed might not be so marked in terms of family finances, but conflict may develop unless work is found eventually. As such a young person, unemployed for long periods, is only eligible for $25 per week Job Search Allowance, family support would be necessary, in some cases placing growing pressure on family harmony.

Welfare advocates have also expressed concern that changes to the availability of the Supporting Parent's Benefit will have adverse impacts on family relations for those affected. In the May 1987 Economic Statement, the Commonwealth announced that once the youngest child of a Supporting Parent's beneficiary turns 16 years, the parent is no longer eligible and will have to seek work or, if unsuccessful, unemployment benefit. Commentators have predicted that such a move will lead to reduced family resources and cause young people to leave school. They also argue that increased numbers of young people will leave home early as a result of the combined effects of this change.

Employment disadvantage through remaining with parents

While the literature on young people leaving home does not usually emphasise the relationship of young people's employment opportunities to those of their parent(s), it is worth noting the circumstances of a number of young people in the Institute study of applicants for the Young Homeless Allowance. Some had left home because to remain with their parents and live in the area where their parents lived would seriously disadvantage their chances of finding work. For example, some young people had come from rural or provincial areas to the city to look for work because there was none available in their area. Their parents were unable to support them away from home, but leaving was seen as the only course open to the young person which offered some choice for the future. Parents were not prepared to say that they would not have their children home under any conditions (a requirement for receipt of the Young Homeless Allowance), but the fact that returning meant being unable to find work placed these young people in impossible situations.

Similarly, there were young people whose parents had shifted to the country either to take up employment or to look for work of a particular kind. Because the chances of a young person finding work in the country were remote, they had decided to stay in the city, but again the parents were unable or unwilling to support them to remain.

In a study of the accommodation needs of young country people, Breen (1987) noted that as well as the need to search for employment, many young people have to shift away from their parents to the city or to large regional centres if they want to continue education or training. They are faced with limited accommodation options when their parent(s) cannot afford to support them.

Leaving School at an Early Age

As the particular concern of this paper is young, unsupported students and young people of school age who might well be students if they were supported, we need to look briefly at some of the literature on early school leaving.

There has been concern since the first Karmel Report (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, 1973) and the Henderson poverty inquiry (Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, 1975) that social disadvantage was being transmitted from generation to generation via the sorting processes inherent in our education system. The very first casualties of this process are those who leave school at or close to the minimum leaving age.

Research evidence has confirmed these concerns. In 1980, a longitudinal study undertaken by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) showed that 'each extra year that early school leavers spend in school increases their chances of finding a job quickly and increases the status of their job while at the same time reducing the likelihood and length of unemployment' (Williams, Clancy, Batten and Girling-Butcher, 1980:95).

Recent figures continue to indicate the disadvantage experienced by early school leavers. For example, the mid-1986 activity profile of 1985–86 school leavers indicated that young people who left school before Year 12

were much more likely to be unemployed and looking for full-time work than those who had completed Year 12 (Commonwealth of Australia, 1987).

Factors contributing to early school leaving

In two ACER studies which examined factors influencing school retention rates, Ainley, Batten and Miller (1984a, 1984b) identified three types of potential influence on individual decisions to remain at school. These were the economic environment, the social–psychological environment and the school environment.

Economic environment

The ACER team concluded that both the state of the labour market and the cost of continuing education influenced decisions to stay at school. Their findings pointed to a critical period at the school leaving age when young people, especially from lower socio-economic groups, may be considering the job market as a realistic alternative to continuing at school. Attention to the labour market was more marked by those from lower socio-economic groups and those with a prior preference to discontinue their education. It was noted that younger students (15 years old) 'were influenced by labour market conditions at the end of a school year when deciding whether or not to prolong their education, but the decisions of older students were not strongly affected by prevailing labour market conditions' (1984b:2).

The study concluded that the availability of a higher level of assistance (through the then Secondary Allowances Scheme) had influenced, at least in part, about half of those continuing on to Year 11, especially those of low socio-economic background.

Some disagreement exists in the literature regarding the influence of financial considerations on educational participation. In an analysis of both sociological and econometric studies conducted in Australia regarding this link, Smith (1984:57) concluded that at least those groups 'at the margin', including those of low socio-economic background, 'are particularly susceptible to these financial or economic factors and are likely to be the students "tipped out" by an unfavourable balance of financial and economic incentives'.

There are two aspects of Smith's analysis which are particularly relevant to situations faced by unsupported youth. The first is that many such young people do come from low income family backgrounds. Consequently, financial and economic factors must be regarded as important influences in their decisions to stay at school or to enter the labour market. Even with the increased levels of assistance available to young people from low income families under current Austudy arrangements, many families find the cost of maintaining children at school prohibitive or a severe strain. A recent newspaper article outlined the plight of some low income families in trying to maintain children at secondary school (The *Age*, 3 February 1988:22).

The second important aspect relates to certain other factors, such as parental encouragement, identified as contributing to retention rates. If parental encouragement is an important contributing factor to young people staying on at school then it can only be concluded that unsupported

youth, regardless of their socio-economic background, receive far less such incentive than young people at home. Whatever their socio-economic background, young people living without support from their families have a more immediate imperative — that of survival. Financial and economic considerations then become paramount.

Social–psychological environment

The ACER research identified high socio-economic status and being the child of a migrant from a non-English-speaking background as the two social factors most likely to influence young people to stay on at school. The study concluded that: 'The interpretation of the association between retentivity and socio-economic background remains unclear. It could arise from differences in the expectations of parents regarding full-time schooling for their students, or from differences in the financial capacity of families to support children in full-time study, or from a combination of these factors.' (Ainley, Batten and Miller, 1984b:133)

Perhaps a higher socio-economic background, if it is accompanied by a higher family value on education, might mean that there is more incentive for some young unsupported students to persevere with education, despite the obvious financial difficulties of doing so. Two other findings support this possibility — a survey of students that indicated that personal investment was the highest ranking reason for returning to school, and other cited research which showed that 'personal factors such as self-concept of ability, educational aspirations and the perceived supportiveness of teachers have been found to be associated with a propensity to remain at school' (1984b:4).

Both these findings suggest that for some students without the support of their families, a personal conviction that continued schooling is worthwhile, combined with supportive school structures, could provide sufficient motivation to continue; it would also be necessary for such young people to have appropriate support outside of school.

School environment

In a study of why students stay in high school in Victoria, Ainley, Batten and Miller (1984a) identified a number of factors related to the curriculum of particular schools. Those schools which offered a broader curriculum at Year 11 rather than being closely linked to Year 12 requirements showed higher retention in Year 11. The pattern was repeated at Year 12 where alternative courses to HSC (now called VCE) were offered. It appeared that students responded to curriculum offerings that were less narrowly based and more relevant to the broader needs of future social and labour market conditions.

Other school factors that were found to be important, where they existed, were 'a sense of achievement, a sense of relevance, and a feeling of good relations with teachers' (1984a:146).

Families as a factor contributing to early school leaving

A fourth environmental factor not directly considered by the ACER studies is that of families. Perhaps the interaction of school and society described in

the research is so embedded in the widely varying experience of families as a mediating structure that it is not possible to consider family as a separate factor, but only as one which underlies all other factors. Certainly the influence of social class and family income is based fundamentally on family. The learning of values regarding education and work takes place in the context of families. Even the personal experience of school is in many ways influenced by young people's lives within families.

The nature of family life is undergoing significant change. Those changes that most relate to the plight of unsupported youth are increased rates of divorce, separation and remarriage, and the impact of economic change as it affects family income. Australian Institute of Family Studies research shows that economic difficulties contribute to conflict within families and to family dissolution (McDonald, 1986). Data from overseas studies confirm higher divorce rates among families affected by unemployment (Haskey, 1984). The two groups that have most swelled the ranks of those in poverty over the last decade have been families with children and single- parent families (Burbidge, 1984; Gallagher, 1985; Cass, 1987). Conflict and family change are the two most pervasive aspects of the lives of young people who have lost their families, who have had their families disintegrate, or who have become alienated and estranged from their families.

Despite the difficulties of isolating family from other social and economic factors, it is obvious that changes in family structure can affect educational participation. Family breakdown can affect a young person's motivation and commitment to education, as well as the economic resources available for education. At the most basic level, a young person can be left without a home and without the resources required to continue at school.

Implications of Leaving Home and Early School Leaving

At this stage, it is useful to point to some factors which emerge from this outline of reasons why young people leave home and leave school: final sections of this report will discuss short and long-term policy issues in detail.

As far as unsupported students are concerned, the impact of economic and financial factors is central. Low income and unemployment affect the chances of young people staying at school, the chances of families breaking up and the chances of unsupported youth, regardless of family income, meeting the costs of educating and supporting themselves. Many homeless young people will carry with them a belief in the value of education and may need no more than appropriate support and encouragement to continue schooling or return to study. However, many others will see no worth in continuing with an experience which was alienating for them and seemed to offer no return. Substantial changes in what schools offer will be required for these young people to choose to remain at school.

The impact of changes in family stability are significant for all young people. Younger teenagers often leave home because of increased conflict and tend to leave school as a result. While there may be a greater possibility of this occurring when family incomes are low, family breakdown occurs irrespective of class. Apart from the obvious impact on the ability of homeless young people to live and to continue studying, there are also psychological effects. At the time of family breakdown a young person's

self-confidence and belief in the future may be affected, making it hard to continue with education and to focus on future goals. Again, personal support structures, both within the community and within educational institutions, are required to overcome the combined effects of loss of family and loss of economic security.

Family conflict, young people's desire for independence and the effect of economic hardship and unemployment are well established as reasons for young people leaving home in the 1980s. In some cases these three factors are closely interwoven. Although there are many reasons for conflict within families, the effects of separation, divorce and repartnering have been identified as factors causing pressures on families which result in young people leaving home. There is little evidence that there has been a major shift in the age at which young people finally leave home; however, there are changes in patterns before finally leaving home, particularly the pattern of leaving home and returning.

Families do not always provide a protective and caring environment for young people. There are significant numbers, particularly young women, who are subject to abusive relationships in families. It is impossible to judge what percentage of young people in such situations are able or willing to leave home, but it is certain that some are forced to do so with inadequate resources for independent living.

3. Youth Homelessness

This chapter looks more broadly at issues of youth homelessness and reviews the literature in order to identify the major needs of unsupported homeless youth.

The term 'homeless' has tended to become a catch-all for people in a variety of situations. The bibliography on homelessness recently released by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (Loft and Davis, 1988), contains numerous definitions and comments on the parameters of homelessness. In his introduction to the bibliography, David Field concludes that the search for single answers to the questions, 'what is homelessness?' and 'who are the homeless?' is likely to be fruitless because all definitions depend on our personal perspective of causes and solutions.

When we talk about young people as 'homeless', it can be a way of objectifying and de-personalising them, of seeing them as different. It is easy to forget that given certain circumstances many of us could become homeless, and that the hopes and anxieties and therefore many of the needs of homeless young people are the same as those of people who are not homeless. Labelling someone as 'homeless' can also immediately define the problem in our minds as one needing a predominantly welfare solution (for example, short-term refuge-type housing), rather than one requiring an examination of the broad issues of housing for all young people.

During the 1970s, a variety of individuals and organisations attempted to alert government and the public to the fact that there was an increasing number of young people, including some still at school, who were trying to survive independently, were living constantly on the edge of poverty and were receiving little or no support from their families. There was a particular focus on two (related) problems which these young people faced: very limited or no income support, and difficulties in finding suitable accommodation. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the needs of groups of young people in widely differing circumstances were expressed in a general concern for so-called 'homeless youth'. Two main groups were identified — young people who had perhaps always been at the margins of adequate accommodation, such as itinerant workers and ex-inmates of either 'correctional' or 'protective' institutions, and the so-called 'newly disadvantaged',

those young people who were caught in the squeeze of high unemployment levels and the scarcity of cheap housing.

Media coverage of youth homelessness, particularly during International Youth Year in 1985 and International Year of Shelter for the Homeless in 1987, has no doubt increased public awareness of the issue. However, there has been a tendency for publicity to be focused on particular groups such as 'street kids'. During the 1980s, youth organisations and others involved in youth issues have argued that the problem extends far beyond those who are forced to live on the streets. There are many young people, from a variety of backgrounds, who can be and are, caught in the trap of inadequate income and lack of affordable housing. Attempts to bring youth homelessness to government and public notice have been coupled with an emphasis on the special needs of young people (for example, young people with a history of institutionalisation and young women) who are not well served by existing policies.

Within the group called 'newly disadvantaged', there is a large number of those who are quite young when they leave their family home and who might in other circumstances be expected to continue with secondary education at least until the age of 16 or 17 years. Generally the literature relating to 'homeless youth', and the increasing coverage of youth homelessness in the media, have not focused on the needs of those who are students when they become homeless, and those who are homeless but would prefer to return to some form of education or training if the opportunity existed. This is not to say that the literature is entirely silent on the characteristics of this group and there are numerous suggestions which might go some way towards improving their circumstances.

Extent of Homelessness

There are difficulties in accurately estimating the number of young people in Australia aged under 18 years who are unsupported. The difficulties stem from the nature of 'homelessness', which often means that people move frequently and have no fixed address, making contact through normal survey methods inappropriate; from the changing circumstances of individuals which often lead to them moving in and out of 'homelessness' over a period of months or years; and from the limitations of available statistical information.

Difficulties of estimation

Surveys on the use of emergency and longer-term accommodation services have yielded some valuable information but they suffer from a number of difficulties, not the least being that requests for accommodation to recognised agencies may overstate the actual number of those seeking assistance but severely under-represent those who do not use such services for various reasons. A recent survey on young women and homelessness strongly suggested that there were significant numbers of young women who avoided contact with accommodation services because refuges did not cater for their particular needs as young females (NYCH, 1987). Evidence presented by youth workers to the 1988 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission inquiry into youth homelessness also showed that some young people

do not approach refuges because they are afraid, or because they believe that refuges are for certain sorts of young people who are not like themselves. There are also indications that when word gets around young people's networks that accommodation services are full or virtually impossible to get into, young people do not contact referral services (Low, Crawshaw and Mathews, 1984).

Administrative data give information about the numbers of young people receiving certain allowances and benefits, but it is rarely possible to identify those who are assisted because of their home circumstances. The number of young people receiving the Young Homeless Allowance, the one allowance which is specifically designed for this group of young people, was approximately 5316 as at July 1988, including those receiving the independent rate of Austudy on the basis of 'homelessness'. However, this is of little use in estimating overall numbers because eligibility criteria for the Young Homeless Allowance are very strict, administrative requirements are deterrents to application, and the existence of the Allowance is not widely known (Maas and Hartley, 1987). Chapter 6 of this report discusses the Young Homeless Allowance in greater detail.

Attempts to estimate the numbers of unsupported students, or unsupported young people who might be studying if not for their circumstances, are fraught with even more difficulties (Maas, 1986). Officers of government departments, teachers and welfare agencies know that many such young people exist, but there are no estimates of their number that can be regarded as reasonably accurate. Data collected by research organisations are of little use as information about young people's family or living situations is not consistently gathered. The same problem exists with departmental administrative data where, in most cases, it is not possible to obtain information sufficiently disaggregated to identify even similar populations.

Apart from the Census, all methods of estimating the size of a particular group rely on sampling the most stable of environments — that is, households. Unfortunately, homeless young people are least able to be sampled in this way and even the Census will not necessarily identify all such people. Other techniques, such as interviewing youth through agencies like the Commonwealth Employment Service or welfare agencies, calling for volunteers or canvassing patrons of entertainment centres, are likely to suffer from forms of bias which make them unreliable as a base from which to generalise.

How big a problem?

Given the difficulties outlined above, what can be said regarding numbers of unsupported youth? The Report of the National Committee for Evaluation of the Youth Services Scheme (1983), entitled *One Step Forward*, included the first attempt at a reasonably comprehensive record of numbers and characteristics of young people assisted by emergency accommodation programs. The Report drew on various State surveys (Victorian Consultative Committee on Social Development, 1979; Department of Community Welfare Services, 1980; de Vere, 1981; Scholley, 1981; Gilbert, 1982) and provided a comprehensive summary of the experience of all State and Territory programs at the time. Although the data were collected in 1981,

and the writers point to limitations in its usefulness, the Report remains a useful source of both qualitative and quantitative information about the population of young people who use emergency accommodation services.

Limitations noted by the authors of *One Step Forward* are as follows: only some of the alternative places for youth to seek shelter were surveyed; youth who did not approach Government and welfare agencies for assistance were not included; needs of some geographical areas without accommodation services were not included; not all cases were recorded; and there was a certain amount of double and multiple counting (pp.23–24). With these limitations, the Report estimated that about 15 000 requests for emergency accommodation were made in 1981–82.

Comparable recent figures are not available. In 1987 an Australia-wide survey was conducted of services funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), the current Commonwealth/State program under which accommodation for homeless youth is provided. The survey included data on services during a particular period in April 1987, and a continuing client data collection. Unfortunately, the resulting information on youth services is incomplete (figures for the ACT and Queensland are not available and Western Australia used different variables for some data) and there have been delays in processing the data. The structure of the national data collection was such that is is not able to answer some significant questions concerning the young people who use services. At the time of writing, a comprehensive summary of survey results was not available; however, some information from the survey is included in the following discussion.

In trying to estimate the extent of youth homelessness, Fopp (1987) has argued that all young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years who are unemployed and identified in Australian Bureau of Statistics data as not a member of a family could reasonably be expected to face severe accommodation and housing difficulties. In 1984, there were 17 000 such young people aged between 15 and 19 years. For any realistic assessment, numbers of unsupported young people who are employed and on very low wages must be added to this estimate.

Homeless students

In the *One Step Forward* report, students represented 21 per cent nationally of those seeking assistance from youth refuges. Those aged 12–15 years ranged from 27 per cent up to 38 per cent of refuge clients in some States. Altogether, young people of school age comprised 68 per cent of those accommodated, while the percentage was as high as 87 per cent in South Australia. In the 1987 national SAAP data collection, 23 per cent of clients in youth services were aged between 12 and 15 years, the figure rising to 33 per cent for New South Wales.

Homeless young females tend to be somewhat younger than males and therefore those under school leaving age include a slightly greater proportion of girls. Females comprised approximately 52 per cent of the 12–15 year-olds in the 1987 SAAP data collection, but at older ages the proportion of females dropped considerably, the overall percentage being 39 per cent (Department of Community Services and Health SAAP data, 1987).

A survey of a number of refuges in 1985 revealed that approximately 19 per cent of all contacts (that is, both referrals and those accommodated) in these refuges were school-aged students. Numbers of females and males were fairly evenly divided. The majority of students tended to be in the 14–16 year age group. Over one-third of the students staying at refuges were aged 15 years, 18 per cent were aged 14 years, and 17 per cent aged 16 years (Maas, 1986).

Finally, the 1987 SAAP Review revealed that the average age of users was less than when the Youth Services Scheme data were collected at the beginning of the 1980s. The SAAP Review figures, based on interviews conducted across a broad range of services, found that the age of users peaked at 15 to 16 years for males and 14 to 15 years for females (Chesterman, 1988).

Needs of Young, Unsupported Homeless People

The following discussion focuses on accommodation, income support and personal support services. While these three areas almost certainly reflect the most pressing needs of unsupported, homeless youth, it is important to remember these people are first and foremost *young* people, with all the range and diversity of needs which that implies: they are entitled to *all* of the opportunities and services which are recognised as necessary for a productive life.

There are areas of policy and services, such as health, which are only just beginning to be discussed in relation to youth. The comprehensive Victorian report, 'Health for Youth' (Youth Policy Development Council, 1987), emphasises the importance of adequate and appropriate health and recreational services for youth; such services are obviously very important for unsupported youth. The report also stresses the interaction between areas of youth policy and the consequent need for coordination of all government and community efforts to ensure a more positive environment for young people.

Short-term and Emergency Accommodation Options

Only a fraction of requests by young people for emergency accommodation can be met. Recent evidence indicates that the percentage of young people who approach refuges but can not be accommodated (refusal rates) in some areas is as high as 76 per cent (Youth Accommodation Association NSW, 1987). Evidence from the Youth Accommodation Coalition to the 1988 Human Rights Commission Enquiry confirmed this percentage for Victoria. The survey of youth accommodation services conducted for the SAAP Review reported that the dearth of affordable accommodation places additional strain on supported accommodation. Perhaps up to 50 per cent of young people housed in supported accommodation could have been more appropriately housed in non-supported or minimally supported accommodation — that is, they were simply in need of accommodation but could not afford it in the market place (Schwager, 1988). Many young people unable to find places in short-term accommodation services stay with friends and relatives, but such arrangements are often temporary and place young peo-

ple in a mendicant situation. Other alternatives are those which are periodically highlighted in the media — living rough in parks, lanes, shop doorways, waste disposal bins and unhealthy and dangerous abandoned buildings.

After Short-term Accommodation

The report of the National Committee for Evaluation of the Youth Services Scheme (1983), *One Step Forward*, indicated that of those aged 16 years and under, the two most common destinations after leaving emergency accommodation were return to family and relatives and being placed in some form of welfare accommodation. Older teenagers were more likely to live independently or with friends. Of young students, 52 per cent went back to families and 27 per cent found another welfare placement. The report notes that 'the group who have least options of places to go are the students' (p.68).

Comparable and reliable data from the 1987 SAAP data collection are not available. Information was sought on the type of living arrangements young people had before and after a period in a youth supported accommodation facility, but the percentage of responses in the 'don't know' category, particularly for living arrangements *after* short-term accommodation (41 per cent), makes other percentages practically meaningless. Nevertheless, 16 per cent of young people are recorded as coming from other supported accommodation (and 9.2 per cent from a car, squat, the street or a tent) and 13.8 per cent as moving to another supported accommodation service (3 per cent to a car, squat, tent or the street) (Department of Community Services and Health SAAP data, 1987).

A major concern is that while in some cases refuges or shelters (short-term accommodation) might have filled a 'time out' function for some young people, for many a return home is only temporary. The National Committee for Evaluation of the Youth Services Scheme (1983:75) stated that they have 'reason to doubt that for a considerable proportion of youths, returning home is really a satisfactory outcome for them in the long term' and concluded that many young people have been leaving home and then returning to try again on several occasions. This pattern of leaving home, returning and leaving again, which is confirmed by Australian Institute of Family Studies research, was discussed in Chapter 2.

There is a high and perhaps increasing proportion of young people who leave a refuge only to return in the near future, reflecting the extreme difficulty of finding suitable long-term accommodation. Roughly one third of the young people included in the *One Step Forward* analysis had previously sought assistance from welfare accommodation services. More recently, a survey of services in Western Australia found that a total of 43 per cent of young people in refuges had previously been assisted by the reporting agency or by some other supported accommodation service (Gevers, 1987).

The original intention behind the setting up of refuges was to provide relatively short-term accommodation for young people who it was thought would either return home after the crisis was over, or move on to longer-term accommodation. The second option has become increasingly difficult

if not impossible, given the dearth of suitable and affordable accommodation. Some youth workers refer to the practice of 'refuge hopping', which has become the only option for many young people. A South Australian report on youth housing suggests that 'there is a danger that youth shelters may become the "institutions" of the 1980s in the same way orphanages or cottage homes did in the past' (South Australia, 1987:112).

Until recently, young people were not considered by most public housing authorities as in sufficient need to warrant being placed on their lists. However, in most States they are now considered eligible and in some places special programs have been instituted to meet the particular living requirements of groups of young people. Access offered by housing authorities varies considerably across the States (Department of Community Services and Health, 1987). Unfortunately the backlog of years of neglect in the public housing area and increased demands from other family types means that the public housing sector will not be capable of meeting the demand for youth housing in the forseeable future. In addition, much of the existing stock of public housing i. not suitable for housing young single people, particularly those who *wish* to live on their own

In the private rental sector, opportunities f(unsupported youth are severely limited because of high rents and establishment costs and the generally low level of income of even employed young people. In additi)n, young people often have great difficulty in convincing agents and landlords that the increasingly scarce rental accommodation sh.uld be let to them. The availability of more affordable forms of accommodation such as boarding or rooming houses has decreased, although the suitability of some of this accommodation for young people is questionable.

Meeting Accommodation Needs

The literature on homeless youth listed in the bibliography compiled by Loft and Davis (1988) describes in detail the level of provision of services necessary to meet the accommodation needs of homeless young people. It also emphasises the importance of recognising that, while all young homeless people have a common need for suitable accommodation, they cannot be regarded as a homogeneous group. Individual needs may vary according to age, sex, culture, location, disadvantage, degree of independence, level of skills and activity. Nor will needs remain static; they will change as young people move through different stages. It is important therefore to provide a range of different accommodation options. The South Australian report recommends that an underlying principle for the provision of accommodation for all persons aged between 12 and 25 years should be that accommodation is 'designed, managed or supported in ways which enable residents to achieve the personal goals of competence, responsibility, greater independence, and the constructive social relationships to which they aspire' (South Australia, 1987:vi).

Existing government resources for accommodation are mainly concentrated on the provision of short-term or emergency housing, especially in the form of youth refuges. There has been very limited attention to developing longer-term accommodation choices. As noted earlier, even in the provision

of short term and crisis accommodation, it is estimated that only a small proportion of the requests for assistance is being met. In addition, referrals to crisis accommodation are often inappropriate, being the only available option for young people seeking more permanent housing.

Unsupported youth

While there is unequivocal support in the literature for the continued provision of emergency accommodation services — that is, refuges or shelters — it is also universally recognised that solutions must be found for both the medium and long-term accommodation problems of young people who cannot remain with their families for whatever reason. The following proposals have been made in various reports.

For very young people, those from 12 years and possibly up to 15 and 16 years in some cases, family or community placement schemes are frequently suggested, either as fostering situations or, for older youth, as supported boarding options (Scholley, 1981; Child Welfare Practice and Legislation Review Committee, 1983; Hancock and Burke, 1983). Hancock and Burke report that eight out of twelve refuges surveyed in Sydney and nine out of fifteen in Melbourne favoured this option as 12–15 year-olds 'were often described as too young and inexperienced for independent living but likely to respond well to a family situation' (p.110). It was suggested in the SAAP Review that community placement schemes work well in country areas where there is a sense of community identity and responsibility (Chesterman, 1988). However, youth workers and others express some doubts about community placement schemes as a solution for this young age group, the most common being the difficulty of finding the 'right' placement where individuals will be able to get both appropriate care and support as well as assistance to become independent.

The accommodation needs of this younger group pose particular problems. As State community service and welfare departments move towards de-institutionalisation, other alternatives must be found. The age group for youth accommodation services under SAAP is defined as 12–25 years, but refuges are not seen as suitable for most in the younger age range, particularly 12–15 year-olds. The South Australian report on youth housing notes that 'SAAP services are being required to deal with a number of young people in this age group who demonstrate a need for levels of supervision and support beyond the capacity of shelter resources and sometimes beyond their legal mandate' (South Australia, 1987:110).

For young people from about 15 to 18 years, supervised hostel-type accommodation is frequently suggested, especially for the younger members of this group (de Vere, 1981; Scholley, 1981; Hancock and Burke, 1983; Tiver and Naufal, 1983; Committee of Inquiry into Homelessness in the ACT, 1984). This approach is seen as providing situations where young people can develop independent living skills before moving on to their own accommodation. However, it is also suggested that for a significant proportion of this age group, the detached housing worker or externally supported service is appropriate. This approach generally involves a funded worker providing advice and support to young people in one or more accommodation services but not living with the young people.

Support from an external housing worker is also seen as appropriate for some older teenagers, together with various forms of independent living accommodation such as community-managed boarding houses, shared accommodation with visiting support workers, and private renting with rental and/or bond assistance.

Again, it should be remembered that age is not the only criterion for independent living and that young people of the same age may have differing accommodation requirements. One survey of service users indicated quite strong support for mixed-age accommodation because the respondents saw benefits in mixing with a variety of people (Gevers, 1987). The same survey found that young people were divided over what was the best sort of service for young homeless people, with 46 per cent believing that internally supported accommodation (with full-time, live-in staff) was best, and 35 per cent favouring externally supported accommodation (shared households visited occasionally by a support worker). This reinforces the need for a variety of accommodation services. However, common to both groups was an emphasis on independence. Even those favouring internally supported accommodation stressed the need for independence within the house with staff being available but not directive (Gevers, 1987).

A number of reports emphasise the importance of young people having access to locally-based accommodation. Many wish to live independently from parents but they want to remain in the general area close to friends, family and familiar places. In research regarding locational preferences, important reasons given by young people for preferring to stay in their local area were being close to friends and families, 'knowing the area' and 'being able to survive' (Hancock and Burke, 1983). Problems of loss of support networks often exacerbate the situation of homeless youth. Young people wanting to continue their education may be particularly disadvantaged if they cannot find accommodation reasonably close to their school. Certainly in some suburban areas the chances of finding affordable rental accommodation which would allow young people to continue at the same school are practically non-existent.

Students

Although about 20 per cent of those seeking assistance from refuges are students, refuge accommodation is not regarded as suitable for them, especially in the medium to long term. As indicated above, this is especially the case for very young students, those aged between 12 and 15 years.

There are other service approaches described in the literature which seem more suited to the accommodation needs of unsupported students. It is reasonable to suggest that the younger the student the greater the need for supervision and support. Placement in family or semi-family type situations could be the best solution for some 12–15 year-olds who cannot return satisfactorily to their own families. However, it is not always appropriate for students at the upper end of this age range, and youth workers stress the need for caution with such schemes.

Another option for some students is that of supervised hostel accommodation. A third approach, more suited to students at higher secondary levels, is that of independent living in suitable low-cost accommodation. Some

schemes are described which aim at assisting young people in the private rental market with bond assistance and in the public housing sector by providing single young people with access to flats or lodgings run by community organisations (Hancock and Burke, 1983). However, all of these assume access to some source of income.

Income Support

Discussion regarding access to income for young unsupported people focuses on problems caused by unemployment, high housing costs, inadequate levels of unemployment benefit, and for those few young people who are eligible, inadequacy of the Youth Homeless Allowance. There is occasional mention of the virtual impossibility of students remaining in education with very little or no income. Commonwealth government provision of income support will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

There is almost universal acknowledgement in the literature of the very close relationship between inadequate income and homelessness and the fact that without an adequate income, escape from homelessness is virtually impossible. The level of income support from the Job Search Allowance (for 16 and 17 year-olds), the intermediate rate of unemployment benefit (18 to 20 year-olds), Austudy and the Young Homeless Allowance is well below the poverty line.

Youth wage rates are based on implicit assumptions of dependence and lower living costs. So also are payments to unemployed young people. For 16 and 17 year-olds, this is made even more obvious by the change of name from junior unemployment benefit to Job Search Allowance (and the reduction in the allowance for all but youth from low income families). The allowance cannot possibly be a living allowance; it is for job search expenses. It is therefore assumed that young people are supported in all other ways by their families.

This is clearly not the case for many young people. A recent survey of young unemployed people, both those living at home and independently, included a significant number whose parent(s) were unwilling or unable to provide any assistance. Some unemployed young people living at home were paying board and contributing to family finances in other ways (Developmental Youth Services Association, 1988). The same survey found that few young people whose benefit would be reduced with the introduction of the Job Search Allowance expected that parents would be able or willing to make up the difference. In a study of TAFE student finances, Powles (1986) also found that the transfers between parents and children were not always from parent to child.

There have in fact been very few attempts to spell out a consistent rationale for the level of youth wages relative to adult wages (Short, 1987). Very little is known about the actual income, living costs and patterns of expenditure of young people, living at home or independently, but it is obvious that there are no junior rates for food and rent (Buckle, 1986). A study of young people's incomes and living costs currently (1988) being conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies should throw some light on the situations in which some young people find themselves in their endeavours to survive financially. Preliminary examination of some existing data sources

on youth incomes indicates that the levels of income of young people with jobs are extremely low, which means that a satisfactory standard of living is very much dependent on what parents can provide in the way of accommodation and other assistance. Where no assistance is available, young people are often in desperate situations. The same data also indicate that young people are more likely to be living away from their parents if they are unemployed and that females are more likely to have left their parents' home regardless of age or labour force status (Maas, 1988).

It is difficult to separate out the problems of inadequate income and lack of appropriate housing; solutions to homelessness will also be solutions to unemployment and poverty. Recent trends in the youth labour market clearly influence the adequacy of income support. Of crucial importance is the difficulty which many young people, particularly early school leavers, have in securing long-term, full-time employment. Characteristics of the youth labour market which affect young people's access to adequate income are a dramatic decline in the availability of full-time work and limited access into a narrow range of occupations. Part-time work has expanded but is characterised by short hours, low rates of pay, no security of employment and is dominated by full-time students. Unemployment rates have reached high proportions, the February 1988 figure for males aged 15–19 years being 20 per cent, and for females 24.3 per cent. The mean number of weeks duration of unemployment for males aged 15–19 years was 21.2 weeks and for females 23.2 weeks as at February 1988. In addition, large numbers of young people are among the hidden unemployed, especially young females.

It is obvious that these circumstances make it virtually impossible for a significant minority of young people to secure a liveable wage. Those who have no family support are frequently in situations of extreme poverty.

Support Services

As indicated, most of the literature indicates that there is a need for more *supported* accommodation — that is, places which provide assistance in one form or another in addition to a place to eat and sleep. An underlying principle of many youth accommodation services is that they should help young people to develop responsibility and independent living skills by giving them the opportunity to organise their own lives and make their own decisions wherever possible.

The support services which young people need obviously vary considerably with individual circumstances, and it should be emphasised that the following discussion does not imply that all unsupported young people require such services; some need only the opportunity to earn a reasonable wage and to find affordable and appropriate accommodation.

Nevertheless, service workers consulted in the SAAP Review saw many of the difficulties of users in terms of 'social dysfunction' rather than in terms of economic necessity. The significance of this is not clear. Schwager suggests that it may mean a shift in presenting problems, along with a shift towards younger users, or it may mean that workers are becoming more aware of the complex dimensions of homelessness. Whatever the reason, there are major implications for the types of support service required. 'The

most common description of social dysfunction was "severe depression", "low self-esteem", "beginning to offend in the community", "appearance at court" . . . coupled with descriptions of broken/alcoholic homes, violence, sexual abuse and continued transience of parents' (Schwager, 1988:18).

The literature describes a range of services either being provided or which should be provided for young people in refuges. They include personal counselling, family counselling, employment assistance, accommodation referral, assistance with obtaining benefits, and drug and alcohol treatment.

A major difficulty is being able to provide the particular sort of help which any individual might need at a particular time. There are indications that general personal support and information about benefits, accommodation options and employment possibilities are seen as useful by most young people. This is reflected in data from the Western Australian survey of youth accommodation service users which noted that 74 per cent of those interviewed saw advice and advocacy regarding employment as useful, 59 per cent thought it was useful to have advice about accommodation and 58 per cent found personal counselling useful. The counselling which was favoured was informal -- that is, having day-to-day contact with workers and the chance to talk over problems. About a quarter of those interviewed felt strongly that personal counselling should be voluntary only and not forced on people (Gevers, 1987).

However, the SAAP Review reports that there is a widely held belief among workers that the vast majority of young people now using supported accommodation services are in need of extended support if they are to have a stable future (Schwager, 1988). The problems which some young people face (for example, as a result of extreme violence in the family or because of a long history of being in institutions) are not likely to be solved by general information service support. McDivett (1986) notes that youth workers do not have the time, or often the skills to help some young people in shelters resolve their problems. He describes how even though some may be better off away from their families, they are not necessarily better off in youth shelters which can foster undesirable behaviour and become negative rather than positive learning environments because of the concentration of emotionally scarred young people. If these young people are to be helped, some at least are going to need access to the sort of long-term individual support which is not able to be provided by overworked refuge staff.

The literature includes a number of examples and suggestions concerning development of responsibility and independent living skills. Gevers (1987) found strong support among refuge residents for young people participating in decision making in the household. McDermott (1984) suggests that independence may be best promoted by not having an adult live in, but by having a support worker available who can provide general support and advice including advice as to how conflicts within the household can be handled. He also suggests that while 'skill development' may be necessary, it should not be approached on too structured a basis. In particular, allowances should be made for the fact that managing personal finances on a very low income requires better budgeting skills than is required from a normal wage earner. Other commentators have made the point that the concept of budgeting on a very low income has little meaning.

While most of the discussion has been concerned with the sorts of coun-

selling, support and referral services mentioned above, there are a number of examples of, and suggestions for, services based on the needs of specific groups:

- The Hobart-based Housing and Young People's Outreach (HYPO) supplies a centralised service for collating private rental vacancies, providing transport and advice in selecting suitable accommodation, conflict resolution for young people in households, legal and health liaison, help with setting up a household, and a 24-hour crisis call service (McDivett, 1986:38).
- The Inner City Street Kids Project is a Community Services Victoria (CSV) program in which youth workers meet young people on the streets and attempt to link them back into their own communities before they start to identify with 'hard core' street kids and take part in their activities (CSV Links, 1987:4).
- The report of the South Australian Youth Housing Enquiry suggests a contact centre which would provide baggage holding, mail receipt facilities, showers, personal advocacy and information and referrals for young people who are transient or homeless (South Australia, 1987: App.A:17).

Finally, the literature mentions support services which are *not* provided sufficiently. These include support designed specifically for young women, young pregnant women, victims of sexual abuse, young lesbian women, young people with a psychiatric history (NYCH, 1987), transient youth, young people in country areas (Gevers, 1987), disabled young people, and youth with a history of institutionalisation.

Support services for students

There is some recognition in the literature of the need to provide secondary school age students lacking the support and assistance of a home environment with structures and/or services which will help them to continue their education. The report of the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare (1982) suggests that schools are best placed to at least identify children in unsatisfactory home situations who might need some form of asistance, a point which the *One Step Forward* report (1983) develops in suggesting the establishment of family counselling services in or near schools: this report also suggests that detached youth workers, operating in conjunction with, but separately from, accommodation services may be able to provide continuing support to young people and their families where re-union has been possible.

Schools can help to identify unsupported and potentially homeless youth. On the other hand, the structure and organisation of schools may contribute to early school leaving and subsequent departure from home. While there is a strong possibility that once a young person leaves home, she or he will soon leave school as well, the obverse tendency is also evident. Those young people who leave school early are also likely to leave home at a young age (Young, 1984). Much attention has been paid in recent years to the causes of early school leaving and the relevance of curriculum offerings ranks high on the list of reasons why some students are alienated from education. As discussed in the preceeding chapter on leaving home and leaving school,

Low, Crawshaw and Mathews (1984) have examined the potential benefits of broader approaches to education and the role which schools could play in providing more rewarding curricula to many who find school irrelevant.

Summary

The nature of homelessness and the circumstances in which young unsupported people live make it difficult to estimate their number with any accuracy. However, there are indications that there could be in excess of 17000 young people aged 15–19 years in Australia who are homeless and not supported (or only minimally supported) by their families.

This chapter has surveyed the literature in order to identify the needs of these young people, particularly those who are students, or who would be studying but for their circumstances. While discussion focuses on accommodation, income support and personal support services, it has been emphasised that unsupported young people are entitled to all the opportunities and services which are considered necessary for a productive life.

Very high turn-away rates from refuges indicate the need for more short-term emergency accommodation, but all reports stress the need to provide affordable and appropriate options for young people after they leave short-term accommodation. For students in particular, the options are severely limited. Various suggestions are discussed, including community placements, hostels, and independent accommodation supported by assistance from other externally-based housing workers.

The current structure of the youth labour market excludes a significant minority of young people from access to other than short-term and part-time employment. Allowances for those who are unemployed are based on often invalid assumptions that families are able and willing to support their teenage children. Low rates of wages for those who are employed mean that young people without family support are often living in or on the edge of poverty.

There is a range of support services identified in the literature. While not all young unsupported people require such services, many are in need of a high degree of personal and social support if they are to lead personally satisfying lives in the future.

4. Changes in Youth Policies

To provide a background for the following chapters which discuss current provisions for young homeless people, this chapter outlines some of the major reports and reviews concerning young people in Australia and traces developments in Commonwealth government policy since 1983.

The major issues of youth policy at the Commonwealth level are youth unemployment, education and training arrangements including student allowances, systems of income support and, more recently, youth homelessness. There is little emphasis on youth housing as such. Historically, Commonwealth government provision in each of these areas has largely been a series of responses to situations as they became apparent, with subsequent adjustments and changes of direction leading to anomalies, both within and across programs administered by different Commonwealth departments.

Until recently, there was little incentive to develop coordinated and integrated youth policies. However, over the past decade, some of the factors already mentioned in relation to youth homelessness have combined to give youth issues greater prominence in government thinking and in the community generally. Changes in the structure of youth employment, high youth unemployment rates, increasing publicity concerning numbers of young people who are without financial or emotional support from their parents, and more generally, social change, including changes in family structures, have focused attention on the changing roles of young people.

Throughout the period under review here, there is evidence of what might be called a background awareness of the fact that there is a minority of young people who, for whatever reason, are not supported by parents. However, at government level, direct attention to their needs has been limited and there has been no thorough working through of a consistent and adequate approach to the problems faced by unsupported and homeless youth.

In the following discussion, the general directions of policy are outlined. Particular attention is paid to the development of the Young Homeless Allowance because its introduction marked a shift in Commonwealth responsibilities for unsupported young people and indicated that the Com-

monwealth accepted some financial responsibility for some young people who did not have support from their families.

Education and Training

Emphasis on the goal of retaining more young people for longer periods of time in education and training has been a dominant theme of youth policies over the past decade.

OECD Report

Shortly after the Labor Government came to power in 1983, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was asked to conduct a review of youth policies in Australia and suggest ways in which the needs of young people could be better met. The government request was supported by a comprehensive and detailed background paper on youth issues in Australia, 'Youth Policies, Programs and Issues' (Department of Education and Youth Affairs, 1983). The report presented by the OECD (November 1984) gave highest priority to the need for more education and training. The following conclusions are most relevant to unsupported youth:

- The most important goal of any new policy initiatives should be to raise educational attainment, increase occupational skills and assume that education and training opportunities are accessible to all without regard to sex and socio-economic status (p.iii).
- Income support arrangements need to be rationalised so as to provide the greatest incentive for productive activities, including enrolment in education and training (p.iv).
- In rationalising income support arrangements, authorities should ensure that low income youth receive adequate support, and ensure that transfer payments do not further aggravate income inequality (p.iv).
- Australia needs to ensure that all young people are guaranteed an opportunity of education or training beyond the lower secondary level, for those who want it, and adequate preparation for work and adulthood, for those who do not continue. To accomplish this, authorities should establish a Youth Entitlement for those continuing secondary education through Year 12, entering apprenticeship, enrolling in further education or vocational training (p.iv).

Participation and Equity Program

The Participation and Equity Program, announced in 1983 as one of the cornerstones of strategies for educational improvement, had as one of its long-term aims a full secondary education for all young people. The program ran until the end of 1987 but financial resources were cut for the final two years of its operation. It provided funds for programs and developmental activities in government schools, non-government schools and technical and further education (TAFE) providers. One of the principles underlying the Program was that:

> Higher participation rates are desirable in themselves for educational reasons, and are increasingly relevant economically and socially. Rapidly changing technologies and related effects on the domestic economy make early school leaving and the consequent entry to the labour market of a large number of young, unskilled school leavers increasingly inappropriate in economic terms . . . what is needed is an improvement in overall educational performance; an increase in the level of participation in education; and more equitable outcomes. (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1985:2)

In regard to unsupported students, the guidelines for the Program recognised that:

> Beyond the compulsory years, lack of income support, homelessness, and health, transport and welfare problems are barriers to participation in education for some adolescents. (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1985:12)

> There are small groups of teenagers who fall outside existing schooling provision altogether, for instance, homeless young people and those who have no family support . . . Another group for whom existing institutional arrangements are inadequate are young refugees from war-torn areas who have had little or no schooling and who require extensive and specialised assistance. (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1985:16)

A small proportion of funds allocated to each State was available for non-institutional education programs which were seen as appropriate for particularly disadvantaged groups. It was felt that not all young people learn best in a formal educational setting and that a non-institutional approach may be more appropriate for some students as community groups can provide valuable opportunities for young people.

The Participation and Equity Program in schools was administered and implemented through State Departments of Education (and non-government education authorities), so the emphasis was understandably on programs in schools. Promotion of non-institutional programs was slow to begin and interest by community groups was limited to a handful of projects in each State. Given the difficulties of catering for homeless young people within mainstream schooling, the limited attention to non-institutional options is unfortunate. Even if school offerings are attractive and relevant to their needs, unsupported students require support structures which relate to their special status. Such young people may need access to counselling services, to special assistance with studies, assistance in dealing with outside agencies and school authorities, and perhaps a less regulated environment that allows combinations of schooling and work.

It is generally conceded that the Participation and Equity Program encouraged attention to ways in which more students could be retained at school, provided support for State initiatives which were moving in the same direction, and gave legitimacy to those groups wanting to develop innovative programs. However, as far as homeless young people are concerned, all the indications are that the majority of those of school age do not continue with education. While individual schools and individuals in schools may assist some homeless students to remain at school, schools themselves are not set up to cater for the particular needs of such students.

In the TAFE sector, the Participation and Equity Program provided funds for the development and conduct of courses and programs for young people aged 15–24 who had been unemployed for six of the previous nine months.

Courses were directed towards those most disadvantaged in the labour market and were aimed at encouraging young people to re-enter education; developmental activities were aimed at changing structures and approaches in order that such young people had greater access to tertiary and further education.

Labour Market Programs

The report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs (1985) is known as the Kirby Report after its chairman, Mr Peter Kirby. It focused on the design of labour market interventions to maximise Australia's chances of producing a skilled, flexible and fully employed workforce. However, it reiterated the theme of the necessity to increase young people's involvement in schooling beyond the compulsory years. While not identifying unsupported youth as a group specifically in need, the Kirby Report noted that of 250 000 young people who reach school leaving age each year, as many as 100 000 will 'seek to enter the labour force with no substantial vocational preparation' (p.61).

Early leavers were one of the main targets for suggestions within the Committee's report. Recommendations of relevance to homeless young people were that a system of traineeships combining work and formal education and training should be developed, initially for young people; that various wage subsidy programs be brought together in a single, targeted wage subsidy scheme; and that a single labour market program to support community-based initiatives be introduced.

One of the main outcomes of the Kirby Report was the development of the Australian Traineeship System which aims to provide school leavers with a year of vocational preparation, combining structured on-the-job training and broadly based instruction at a TAFE institution or other approved facility. For the duration of the traineeship, a trainee wage is paid based on the amount of time spent on the job and the relevant junior award wage. The Australian Traineeship System in relation to young homeless people will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Youth Income Suppport

The question of income support for young people has received considerable attention during the 1980s. Many of the issues were discussed in the background paper for the OECD visit (Department of Education and Youth Affairs, 1983). They were taken up in greater detail in a report entitled *Income Support for Young People*, produced by the Office of Youth Affairs (OYA) and the Social Welfare Policy Secretariat (SWPS) and released in January 1984 (Office of Youth Affairs and the Social Welfare Policy Secretariat, 1984).

Five issues confronting reform of income support arrangements for young people were identified in the OYA–SWPS report. They were: the complexity of the schemes then in existence; the inadequacy of existing rates of payment; inequity of means testing arrangements which disqualified too many young people who nevertheless required assistance; incentives inherent in

the then existing structure for young people not to continue their education; and the problem of dependency.

The report recognised that there were 16 and 17 year-olds, both students and unemployed, who were without parental support; one of the suggested options included payment of a living away from home allowance and/or rent assistance for such young people. It was not until several years later that such an allowance became a reality with the introduction of the Young Homeless Allowance.

Youth Supported Accommodation Program

A number of emergency housing schemes evolved during the 1970s including some for youth. In 1985, an attempt was made to rationalise Commonwealth support under one program, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, of which the Youth Supported Accommodation Program (discussed in detail in Chapter 5) is one component. The other components are the Women's Emergency Services Program and the General Supported Accommodation Program. Whereas previous schemes for youth accommodation had operated on a submissions basis, the introduction of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program signaled a change to a needs-based approach.

Priority One

In August 1985, the Commonwealth government's Strategy for Young People, known as Priority One, was announced. The directions of the Strategy drew heavily on the OECD Report, the Kirby Report and the report on Income Support for Young People, as well as on the results of consultations with young people through the Youth Affairs Council of Australia, a National Opinion Polls survey of attitudes of young people and the work of a Task Force on youth policy. The Strategy was announced as bringing to an end the situation where actions in relation to young people had been 'fragmented, uncoordinated and lacking any central thread which would give a sense of unity and direction' (Priority One, 1985:7). A statement by the Prime Minister reiterated the importance of education and training for all, and announced the introduction of a system of traineeships involving off-the-job training and systematic on-the-job training available mainly to 16 and 17 year-old school leavers, particularly those who have not completed Year 12.

Components of the Strategy announced in the 1985–86 budget for progressive implementation were:

- substantial increases in education allowances for secondary students and liberalisation of the parental income test;
- age-related education allowances;
- parity in basic rates for 16 and 17 year-old students and unemployment beneficiaries, and parity in rates for tertiary students aged 18 years and over living away from home with the intermediate rate of unemployment benefit;

- an intermediate rate of unemployment benefit for single people between 18 and 20 years; and
- the introduction of the Young Homeless Allowance, which meant a higher level of assistance to 16 and 17 year-old students and unemployment beneficiaries who were homeless.

Introduction of the Young Homeless Allowance

As the introduction of the Young Homeless Allowance marks the first acceptance by the Commonwealth of responsibility for direct income support of some young people who are not supported by their parents, it is worth looking at the development of the Allowance in some detail.

It has already been suggested that during the 1980s there was a growing awareness among policy makers of the problems of unsupported youth. References to them as a particularly disadvantaged group appear in a number of reports although this awareness has certainly not been followed by adequate support. The awareness stemmed largely from the efforts of various youth and welfare organisations and from emerging pressures on existing programs.

In 1985, the year in which the Priority One strategy was launched, the Commonwealth Department of Education commissioned the Australian Institute of Family Studies to enquire into the needs of unsupported students (Maas, 1986). Existing assistance to students under provisions for the Secondary Allowances Scheme and the Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme assumed parental support but it was becoming increasingly apparent that this presumption was not valid for a minority of students.

In both the education and social security areas, pressure on existing programs of assistance was becoming more obvious. The Commonwealth Department of Education had no way of meeting the increasing number of requests for assistance from homeless students. The Department of Social Security was confronted by the problem of some tertiary students applying for unemployment benefit while studying. These students were debarred from income support from the Commonwealth Department of Education because of the level of their parents' income, but they were often without assistance from their families. They were debarred from receiving unemployment benefit if they were not available for and seeking full-time work. Efforts by the Commonwealth Department of Education to establish the genuineness of the applicant's work readiness or commitment led to elaborate and arbitrary assessments involving long interviews with nearly 30 questions. As some colleges 'coached' students on how to answer, it is not surprising that anomalous outcomes emerged from office to office and State to State. When next confronted by homeless secondary students frankly admitting their status as not looking for work and applying for special benefits, the Department of Social Security responded by denying eligibility and having its decision appealed against to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (Maas, 1987a).

The first of a number of relevant cases to be determined by the Tribunal was that of Mark Spooner — aged 15 years when he left home, and unable to return because of unresolvable family conflict. He subsequently lived at a

Wollongong youth refuge and continued at school as a Year 10 student. While living at the refuge he received occasional ex gratia payments from the New South Wales Department of Youth and Community Services. His intention in applying for Special Benefit was to obtain some financial support to finish his schooling and qualify for an apprenticeship.

The Department of Social Security rejected his application on the grounds that, first, he should sue his parents for support; second, he was in receipt of assistance from the New South Wales Department of Youth and Community Services; and third, he could leave school and enter the labour market, while continuing part-time studies.

In overturning this decision, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal ruling contained three quite significant sets of conclusions.

- Regarding the requirement that Spooner sue his parents for support, the Tribunal noted that: 'The welfare of each of us is to be looked at in isolation taking into account only facts . . . the legal obligations of parents to support their children are not the concern of social security when the welfare of the children is being considered' (Spooner and Secretary to the Department of Social Security, 1985).
- Commenting on the proposition that the Commonwealth had no obligation to a person in receipt of State government support, the Tribunal said: 'The Commonwealth is charged with the basic, recurring, organised support of those in need, with the systematic alleviation of poverty and with the structural support of a minimum level of existence for all Australians' (Spooner and Secretary to the Department of Social Security, 1985).
- Examining the contention that Spooner should cease full-time education, the Tribunal referred to other sections of the Social Security Act relating to family income supplement, family allowance, handicapped children's allowance, and unemployment and sickness benefits. Its conclusion was: '. . . all these sections establish a pattern of support for full-time student children. They point to a policy not to require children to leave school to enter the workforce but to assist their support so that they may obtain an adequate education. The Parliament has deliberately and repeatedly taken the view that it is in the public interest to spend public welfare funds rather than encourage young people to leave their educational institutions' (Spooner and Secretary to the Department of Social Security, 1985).

The Department of Social Security was directed to pay special benefit to Spooner. Summing up its decision to reverse the Department's rejection of special benefit for four other students subsequent to the Spooner case, the Tribunal reaffirmed its view that: '. . . to fail to support determined young people like the four before us would be to fail those whose development will most contribute to society and for whom the community as a whole has the greatest responsibility' (Spooner and Secretary to the Department of Social Security, 1985).

There is some dispute as to whether the Tribunal's rulings are consistent with the Commonwealth's obligations as embodied in legislation. However, at the time, the Commonwealth was not prepared to appeal against the decisions because public feeling about the cases indicated it would not have been politically opportune to do so.

Nevertheless, the decisions embodied principles which reflected both the changed nature of interpersonal responsibility within Australian social and family life and a particular view of the necessary way forward if both individual and social needs are to be met. At a time when neither the systems of employment nor of family support can be relied on to provide a universal basis of security for young people, the view embodied in the Tribunal's reasoning is that in order to secure both individual and community well-being for the future, the community as a whole, via Commonwealth programs, has both a responsibility and a vested interest in providing an adequate and comprehensive framework of income security, educational opportunities and associated support services.

The decisions in relation to Mark Spooner and the four other cases, carefully selected as test cases by the Sydney Welfare Rights Centre for appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (Campbell and Lombard, 1986), almost certainly hastened the introduction of the Young Homeless Allowance. This Allowance was part of the package of youth income support measures developed by a Commonwealth Task Force on Administration of Youth Allowances and announced in August 1985 (Maas, 1987a). It incorporated assistance for unsupported young people who were either under 18 years and receiving unemployment benefits, or students beyond the compulsory age of schooling. Originally planned to commence in January 1987, the Allowance in fact came into operation on 1 July 1986.

Youth Policy — Still Priority One?

Since the announcement of Priority One in August 1985, some significant changes in youth policy have created confusion over the direction in which the Commonwealth is moving and serious concern about whether youth policy can any longer be regarded as a high Government priority. Current Commonwealth programs in the areas of accommodation, income support, education and training as they relate to unsupported youth will be discussed in detail in the following chapters; in this section, developments since the introduction of Priority One are outlined.

Changes to the system of student allowances which brought into line Austudy (student allowance) payments for 16 and 17 year-olds and unemployment benefit for 16 and 17 year-olds came into operation at the beginning of 1987. An intermediate rate of unemployment benefit for 18 to 20 year-olds was also introduced.

In the area of labour market programs, there has been a continued shift away from job creation to an emphasis on skills and training. This was reflected very clearly in the Government publication, *Skills for Australia*, released at the time of the 1987–88 Budget (Commonwealth of Australia, 1987). Efforts to extend the Australian Traineeship System have continued. On the other hand, the Community Employment Program, designed to assist the long-term unemployed, was discontinued at the end of 1987. In the 1988–89 Budget, emphasis on skills and training was continued in general, although there were no new programs introduced specifically for under 18 year-olds.

Perhaps the most important policy change as far as homeless young people are concerned came in the May 1987 Economic Statement when it was

announced that unemployment benefit for under 18 year-olds was to be abolished from January 1988 and replaced by a new payment, Job Search Allowance — the essential features of which are a much longer waiting period upon leaving school, and the introduction of parental income testing for part of the payment. For homeless youth, it introduced a new set of problems, especially for those not able to meet the stringent eligibility criteria established for the Young Homeless Allowance (Maas, 1987b; Maas and Hartley, 1987). These problems will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

As indicated, the Participation and Equity Program was discontinued at the end of 1987 and replaced by a Commonwealth Specific Purpose Program providing Commonwealth funding for systems and schools working towards a broad and balanced curriculum, more 'hospitable, flexible and accommodating' structures, the introduction of 'curriculum contracts with students which may include various mixes of TAFE, part-time work and community projects'; and functioning as 'bases for student counselling where students and ex-students may come for advice on school and career options' (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987:51).

Development of schools in such directions could assist unsupported young people wishing to remain at school or to return to school. In addition, the suggestion that schools play a more active role in the general area of youth support services and establish closer links with Commonwealth Employment Service offices and youth organisations could mean that some young people would be less likely to find themselves without any supports at all if or when they left school.

Summary

This chapter has set the scene for discussing in more detail current provisions for unsupported youth. A strong emphasis on policies aimed at encouraging more young people into education and training, with the long-term expectation that this will improve both individual employment prospects and general economic wellbeing, is evident. The Australian Traineeship System, a principal labour market strategy, reflects this emphasis. Introduction of the Young Homeless Allowance acknowledges Commonwealth government responsibility for (a very limited number of) young people under 18 years who are living independently of their families. At the same time, the abolition of junior unemployment benefit, the introduction of a parental income-tested Job Search Allowance, and an extended waiting time for that Allowance, place the burden of responsibility for young people firmly back on the family, leaving many in a parlous state.

What then are the current Commonwealth government programs which relate to the needs of young homeless people, including those who are students or potential students? The following three chapters discuss Commonwealth provisions under the headings of accommodation, income support, and education and training.

5. Commonwealth Support for Youth: Accommodation

There are three programs which may assist in providing appropriate accommodation for unsupported youth. Two programs operate under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement — the Crisis Accommodation Program and the Local Government and Community Housing Program. The third program is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program which has three components, one of which is directed specifically towards youth. While these programs have no explicit barriers to accommodation assistance for unsupported students, there are nevertheless inherent obstacles in the guidelines which make it more difficult for students than for other disadvantaged youth (including the unemployed) to be housed.

• *The Crisis Accommodation Program* Under this program the Commonwealth government provides capital funds for dwellings to be used for crisis accommodation programs for various groups, including young people. The States use these funds for housing-related expenditure such as purchase, construction, renovation, lease or rents on State-owned dwellings.

• *Local Government and Community Housing Program* This program is intended to assist local government authorities and community-based housing co-operatives and other organisations to provide low cost rental housing in their areas. The program is aimed at increasing localised housing for needy groups generally and is not designed for any specific group. Unsupported young people are clearly in particular need of such accommodation. However, as there are no appropriate support services (such as youth housing officers or youth workers) included in the program, only young people sufficiently independent and mature to cope without support would find this program appropriate; younger people and students would more than likely require support services.

• *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program* Introduced in 1985, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) provides funds for the recurrent and non-housing capital costs of supported accommodation, the funds for housing capital costs being provided under the Crisis Accommodation Program. The program brought together and replaced the numerous housing programs which had evolved during the 1970s for vari-

ous groups including youth, women and homeless persons generally. The three components of the program are: the Youth Supported Accommodation Program, which provides services for 12–25 year-olds; the Women's Emergency Services Program, designed for women with or without dependents escaping from domestic violence; and the General Supported Accommodation Program, directed to men, women and their children.

This program is a joint Commonwealth–State agreement for four and a half years until mid-1989, with States being required to match Commonwealth funds on a dollar for dollar basis. Grants are usually made through the State Departments of Community Services to non-profit welfare organisations, local government authorities and charitable trusts. The guidelines for the program (SAAP, 1984) emphasise the support aspect of accommodation. The program can fund organisations which provide supported accommodation services in refuges, hostels, half-way houses or day centres to those with short, medium or long- term needs. It encourages self-help in a way which recognises the individualism of clients and their needs and it supports their capacity to make decisions for themselves. The program may also specialise in assisting groups with particular needs.

Youth Supported Accommodation Program

The component of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program which is relevant to this discussion is the Youth Supported Accommodation Program (YSAP) which provides services for 12–25 year-olds. The emphasis of this program is on support, rather than just the provision of places to sleep and eat, and on providing assistance to move people to independent living where possible and appropriate. Funds are provided for support services to youth refuges, hostels and other such accommodation, and also for recurrent costs such as wages and rent and non-housing capital items such as furniture and vehicles.

In 1985, 224 youth services (that is, organisations or service sponsors) received funds under the program; some sponsoring services or agencies provided more than one physical location or 'outlet'. Figures for the actual number of outlets were available for the first time in 1987 through the national data collection referred to in Chapter 3. In this year, there were 469 YSAP-funded outlets across Australia, 336 of them designated as accommodation outlets (but also of course providing other support services) and 133 as non-accommodation outlets providing a range of support, advice and advocacy services. Of the accommodation outlets, nearly 40 per cent were categorised as 'open at all times'. However, as data from one State includes a high proportion of cases where information regarding the hours of opening is not recorded, it is difficult to draw any conclusions. If the data from this State are excluded, the percentage of outlets open at all times is approximately 52 per cent (Department of Community Services and Health SAAP data, 1987).

The division of services into accommodation and non-accommodation does not adequately reflect the variety of types of services for homeless young people which have developed under SAAP guidelines. Most of these types of services pre-date the introduction of that program and have evolved

with slightly different emphases in each State. Within the general guidelines, considerable variety exists in the ways in which specific State guidelines have developed (Schwager, 1988).

In order to identify appropriate directions for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program after mid-1989, a major review of the program was conducted during 1988. The review (Chesterman, 1988) identified the following types of services as those which were being provided under the youth component of the program:

- the crisis or emergency refuge or shelter, which is usually open 24 hours per day and provides shelter for short periods (usually a maximum period of from three weeks to three months);
- medium to long-term refuges with recommended stays of three to twelve months, a minority of which operate on a 24-hour basis — there are approximately three times more crisis than medium-term refuges;
- externally supported services, where a YSAP-funded worker provides support and advice to young people who are accommodated in Crisis Accommodation Program houses or other public housing or private rental;
- community placement schemes where those under the age of 15 years are housed with families in the community as an alternative to refuge placement;
- medium to long-term refuge accommodation which is available for particular groups such as young women, emotionally disturbed young people, victims of rape and incest.

Some further comments on the above service types are appropriate.

Shelters/refuges

While the SAAP Review (Chesterman, 1987) saw the continuation of refuges/shelters as essential, it noted that there were a number of criticisms of such services. In particular, it was felt by some refuge workers that they tended to provide an artificial environment which encouraged dependence. Workers in these services believed it was important for most young people to move to a situation of greater independence as soon as possible; the lack of sufficient minimally supported accommodation made this impossible in a lot of cases and young people therefore spent longer than was appropriate in refuges. The tendency for young people to shift from refuge to refuge because of lack of alternative options has already been noted.

Detached housing workers

The SAAP Review notes that provision of a 'detached' housing worker is the most widely supported of all YSAP services. In some cases the young person remains in the house for a relatively short period of time before moving on to independent accommodation; in others it is the support worker who moves on to other houses and the young person stays on. The latter situation gives more stability and security to the young person. In the Western Australian YSAP Review, Gevers (1987) argued strongly for the development of programs for the provision of independent or minimally supported accommodation to cater for young people leaving YSAP services and young

people needing emergency/short-term accommodation but not supported accommodation.

Community placement

The appropriateness of community placement schemes for very young homeless people is recognised. However, there are some concerns about the difficulties involved in making sure that placements are not disadvantageous for the young person, in providing sufficient monitoring of placements, and in ensuring that those who take on the care of young adolescents are adequately compensated.

Services with a particular focus

Services with a particular focus have been extremely valuable in overcoming some of the problems inherent in generalist services, and there are strong arguments for extending such services. However, it cannot be assumed that the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program is the most (or the only) appropriate funding for some specialist services — for example, for emotionally disturbed young people. The concern has also been expressed that with policies of de-institutionalisation, there is a shift in responsibility for accommodation and support for some groups from the government sector to the non-government sector, without a commensurate allocation of increased resources to the non-government sector (South Australia, 1987).

Summary

When the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program was introduced, it was noted that although the program increased levels of funding for accommodation services, placed the planning of projects on a longer-term basis, rationalised existing programs and shifted administration to the State level, it was not clear whether it would contribute significantly to meeting the basic youth accommodation need of medium to long-term affordable accommodation (Maas, 1986).

The problem still remains. The Youth Supported Accommodation Program has unquestionably provided essential supported accommodation, and increased the number and range of services available. In addition, the survey of the program for the SAAP Review suggests that it has enabled a 'youth accommodation movement to consolidate its philosophy and policies' (Schwager, 1988:4). However, the high turn-away rates indicate that resources do not nearly meet the need, and there is a very clear call from those working in the youth housing area for attention to be paid to the provision of a greater range of resources so that support needs of young people may be more adequately met, the development of a greater range of services including essential medium-term and minimally supported accommodation, and the broader problem of provision of appropriate and affordable accommodation for all young people.

6. Commonwealth Support for Youth: Income Support

Commonwealth income support programs relevant to unsupported youth are available under education, training and social security provisions. Current provisions are based on a major review, the outcomes of which were announced under the banner of Priority One, the Commonwealth government's Strategy for Young People, in August 1985. Arising from this, changes to youth income support arrangements shifted the focus of support towards the age of the recipient with less emphasis on employment or student status, especially for those under 18 years. Current provision is the result of progressive implementation of the proposals outlined in 1985 together with a somewhat abrupt change of direction announced in the May 1987 Economic Statement which heralded the replacement of unemployment benefit for those under 18 years with the parental income tested Job Search Allowance (Maas, 1987b).

The three main Commonwealth income support programs for under 18 year-olds are Austudy, Job Search Allowance, and the Young Homeless Allowance.

Austudy

Austudy replaced all previous student allowance arrangements at the beginning of 1986. The program provides a means tested allowance to students aged 16 years and over undertaking approved full-time secondary and tertiary studies. It covers three categories of full-time students: general secondary (secondary students aged 16–19 years), adult secondary (secondary students aged 19 years and over) and tertiary (those aged 16 years and over taking approved post-secondary courses in universities, colleges of advanced education, TAFE colleges and other approved institutions).

Students are defined as either dependent or independent. All dependent students are assessed on the basis of parental income as well as their own income. That is, for dependent students, Austudy is based on an assumption that they are supported by their parent(s). This is not always a correct assumption: some young people struggle to remain at school with little or no support from parents; unemployed parents are very hard pushed to

support children who are students; some of the TAFE students in Powles' (1986) study in fact contributed to household expenditure. .

There are, however, some provisions of Austudy which indicate that official thinking regards 16 years as a reasonable age to at least begin the process of according independent status to young people. For example, rates of payment for Austudy increase as age increases. The maximum at-home rate for 16–17 year-olds is $50 per week and for 18 year-olds and over, $60 per week. For students who are under 18 years, there is provision for payment of assistance direct to the student rather than to the parent(s) (this occurs in approximately 80 per cent of cases), and it is the student who pays tax on the allowance (Maas, 1987b).

Students are categorised as independent if they meet certain criteria. One of the ways in which they can be eligible is to be 'homeless' according to the requirements for receipt of the Young Homeless Allowance. If they come within these definitions, they then receive the independent rate of Austudy which in 1988 is $76 per week for 16 and 17 year-olds and $91.20 per week for those aged 18 years and over.

While the change to an age-related criterion for eligibility for Austudy has generally been welcomed, the position of 15 year-olds remains a major anomaly. Fifteen year-olds who leave home are not eligible for Austudy if they remain in education; nor are they eligible for Job Search Allowance if they are unemployed. They remain dependent on the discretionary Special Benefit. Their exclusion from Austudy allowances is particularly relevant in some States: for example, in Western Australia it is estimated that some 3500 15 year-old secondary students and 1100 15 year-old TAFE students have been disadvantaged by the introduction of Austudy (Western Australia, 1987).

Job Search Allowance

As indicated, one of the main aims of the changes to youth income support measures introduced in the 1985–86 budget was to base allowances on age rather than activity (that is, whether a young person is a student or unemployed), in order to avoid disincentives to study and incentives to 'go on the dole'. Thus there were adjustments made to unemployment benefit arrangements as well as to student allowances. During 1986 and 1987, there were three age-related levels of unemployment benefit for single people over 16 years without dependents. For 16–17 year-olds and for 18–20 year-olds, the rate was equivalent to the corresponding age rates of Austudy; the over 21-years rate was the adult rate of unemployment benefit.

In January 1988, as a result of changes introduced in the 1987 May Economic Statement, the junior rate of unemployment benefit was abolished and replaced by a Job Search Allowance of $25 per week payable 13 weeks after a young person leaves school. A further $25 per week may be paid upon the application of a parental income test similar to the Austudy arrangements, on top of the existing personal income test. Thus a 16 or 17 year-old who is homeless, or becomes homeless, and who is not employed, could be receiving:

- $50 per week Job Search Allowance if she or he is unemployed and from a low income family;

- $25 per week Job Search Allowance if he or she is unemployed and from other than a low income family;
- $50 per week Austudy if he or she is a student and from a low income family;
- no allowance at all if she or he is a student and from other than a low income family.

A small number of the young people who find themselves in any of these positions will be eligible for the Young Homeless Allowance; an even smaller number will actually know of the existence of the Allowance and be able to negotiate the business of successfully applying for it. They will then receive $76 per week (1988 rates).

Young Homeless Allowance

In Chapter 4 the development of the Young Homeless Allowance was traced; in this chapter the provisions of the Allowance are examined in some detail. The Young Homeless Allowance is a payment made to single 16 and 17 year-olds who receive Job Search Allowance and Sickness or Special Benefit, and to full-time students above the minimum school leaving age who satisfy certain legislative definitions of homelessness. For those who are not full-time students, the Allowance is in addition to Job Search Allowance or Sickness Benefit; for full-time students, it is regarded as an independent Austudy allowance.

Provisions for eligibility and payment of the Allowance are contained in two pieces of legislation and administered by two Commonwealth government departments. The Social Security Legislation Amendment Act 1986 (passed in the Autumn sitting of 1986) contains provision for payment of the Allowance to single unemployment and sickness beneficiaries aged 16 and 17 years and is administered by the Department of Social Security. The Allowance is also paid in exceptional circumstances to younger children in receipt of Special Benefit. Provision for payment to full-time students is contained in the Student Assistance Act (1973) and Regulations now administered by the Department of Employment, Education and Training.

Eligibility for the Young Homeless Allowance

There are two fundamental components of the Allowance. The first is the set of criteria relating to 'homelessness'; the second defines 'support' (or rather, the situation of being 'unsupported') and is clearly aimed at minimising the possibility of situations being contrived between young people and their parents in order to obtain the Allowance.

The criteria for establishing homelessness are generally conceded to be exceedingly stringent. They reflect the government's concern not to be seen to be unnecessarily encouraging the breakdown of families or 'opening the floodgates' for payment of the Allowance to large numbers of young people. They may also reflect beliefs that the decision to leave home should not be taken lightly and is not necessarily always in the best interests of young people. An eligible person is one who has no dependents and has been living

away from the parental home for a continuous period of six weeks or more because he or she:

- does not have a parental home;
- is not allowed by the parent(s) to live at home under any conditions;
- cannot, because of circumstances such as domestic violence, sexual abuse or comparable exceptional circumstances, be expected to live with his or her parent(s).

The first of these circumstances — no parental home — refers to situations where the natural or adoptive parents are not living, where their whereabouts are unknown, or where they are in prison, custody, a mental hospital, or otherwise incapacitated so that they cannot provide a home for the young person. Young people who have been granted refugee status, and whose parents are not living in Australia (as is the case with a significant number of Indo-Chinese young people), are considered to have no parental home and are therefore eligible for the Allowance, if of course they are recipients of unemployment or special benefits or in full-time education.

To satisfy the second criterion — not being allowed to live in the parental home — a young person must be refused permission by his or her parents to live at home under any terms or conditions. Not unexpectedly, given the three possible categories for establishing eligibility for the Allowance, most applications have been granted under the 'not allowed to live at home' category. Guidelines for the administration of the Allowance stipulate that both parents, including separated parents, must be contacted to confirm or deny that the young person has been refused permission to live at home.

The third criterion covers situations such as sexual abuse and domestic violence in the family where it is unreasonable to expect the young person to live at home. 'Other exceptional circumstances', also included in this section, must be 'conditions and situations which are similar to those specified in the legislation'. This means that extreme circumstances must actually exist in the parental home which render it unreasonable for the beneficiary to live there because a severe threat is posed to his or her physical, mental or psychological wellbeing.

To be eligible for the Young Homeless Allowance, a young person in one of the above categories must then establish that he or she is not receiving continuous support of any kind from either parent, from a person acting as guardian on a long-term basis, or from another Commonwealth department or State or Territory authority.

The requirements for eligibility thus add up to a situation where a young person is bereft of any emotional or financial family supports.

Numbers receiving the Young Homeless Allowance

The stringency of the eligibility criteria is reflected in the relatively small number of young people receiving the Allowance. At December 1987 there were approximately 3900 in receipt of the Allowance — 1000 through the Department of Social Security and 2900 through the Department of Employment, Education and Training. Figures for 1988 show an increase in numbers receiving the Allowance through both Departments. Of the 5316 young people receiving the Allowance as at July 1988, approximately 1731

were receiving it as an addition to Job Search Allowance; 3583 were receiving independent Austudy on the basis of homelessness.

Implementation of the Young Homeless Allowance

The following discussion is based on the Australian Institute of Family Studies report on the Young Homeless Allowance outlined in Chapter 1 (Maas and Hartley, 1987). Information sources for the report were as follows: case studies of the experiences of 180 young people who had applied for the Allowance; telephone discussions with the youth workers who had forwarded the case study information, and with Department of Social Security officers in each State; personal discussions with youth workers from Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland; a telephone survey of a small number of youth workers covering all States and some major regional centres; and interviews with a number of school welfare coordinators.

Access to information

From the cases examined, it was apparent that there is not widespread knowledge among young people about the existence of the Young Homeless Allowance, nor do those young people who know about it always have accurate information. Most young people need to have left home *and* to have made contact with a government department or welfare agency to become aware of the Allowance.

The Allowance is available as an addition to both Austudy and Job Search Allowance or Sickness Benefit, so the procedures of two Commonwealth departments are relevant. The Department of Employment, Education and Training conducts some information sessions for school and tertiary counsellors and other people concerned with Austudy, to explain both the general provisions of Austudy and the homeless criteria and procedures. There are plans to target more written information to counsellors and others who may advise young people on their eligibility for the Allowance. However, the Department does not have the resources for an extensive program and information sessions outside the metropolitan area are rare. Hence it is still the case that some people in schools who have a responsibility for Austudy applications are not well informed and it is highly likely that information about the homeless provision does not get to some young people who need it.

Although information about the Allowance through the Department of Social Security is now more readily available than in the early days of the introduction of the Allowance, there were examples in the case studies of young people not being told by counter staff that they may be eligible, and of inaccurate information being given about eligibility criteria. The consequences of such misinformation for those young homeless people whose self-esteem has already taken a beating can mean increased alienation and an unwillingness to seek further information.

There is a strong argument for a range of innovative publicity initiatives which take into account the language, skill level, cultural background and location of particular groups of young people. In addition, the Young Homeless Allowance is not likely to operate as an effective safety net for

young people in need unless more information about the Allowance and about youth homelessness generally is directed towards other groups such as:

- teachers, staff members of educational institutions, youth workers and social workers who can play a crucial role in conveying information about the Allowance to young people;
- members of the community who may be able to help verify a young person's situation;
- young people from a non-English-speaking background, including newly arrived migrants, refugees and settlers who have limited or no English language skills, the information to be in their own language;
- Aboriginal youth in both urban and rural areas who generally have no knowledge of the Allowance;
- counter staff and assessment staff from the two Commonwealth departments so that they are kept up to date with accurate information regarding allowances and eligibility, and have an understanding of the situations experienced by the young people they may encounter.

Applying for the Young Homeless Allowance

The onus of proof of eligibility for the Allowance is on the young person. Verification of the claimant's statements must be provided, generally from persons who have independent knowledge of the young person's circumstances. Applications through the Department of Social Security are handled personally; assessment of eligibility through the Department of Employment, Education and Training has relied heavily on written information because that Department in the past (as the Department of Education) has processed only mail applications for student assistance.

The circumstances under which many young people leave home frequently mean that there are strong emotions associated with the decision to leave; the case study material indicated that the application process can place additional pressures on young people at a time when they are least able to cope. Young people are understandably reluctant to reveal to a stranger their home situation and their reasons for leaving home. They often lack the self-confidence and the language skills to handle the application process, and they find the verification process intrusive, insensitive, embarrassing or emotionally upsetting. In addition, the processing of mail applications through the Department of Employment, Education and Training has frequently been subject to long delays, particularly where the original information and/or the supporting statements have been incomplete and the Department has sought further information.

Supporting evidence

The supporting evidence required for an application, and determinations as to who is able and/or competent to provide it, frequently make the application process very difficult for young people. Some of the problems concerning verification which existed with the provisions of the Secondary Allowances Scheme (for example, the question of who constitutes a reliable witness and the use of sworn statements) still remain (Maas, 1986).

The requirement that verification reports should be provided by someone with 'independent' knowledge is often unrealistic. For example, not all young people with difficult home situations have come to the notice of an agency, nor are the details of what goes on in the home necessarily known to neighbours or the school. This is frequently the case where sexual abuse or domestic violence has occurred. In addition, young people who leave home to avoid abusive or painful situations do not usually take with them the sort of documentation which might be useful to prove a case to a government department. In these cases, a statement from a youth worker or refuge worker who has had immediate contact with the young person will more than likely be the most accurate information available about the current situation. There is, however, often a reluctance to accept statements from such workers because they are not regarded as independent.

Written or verbal statements from young people themselves also provide difficulties. Not all young people have the writing skills, the knowledge of English, the familiarity with appropriate forms of expression, or the confidence (particularly when they are going through the emotional experience of leaving home) to explain their family circumstances in a manner acceptable for assessment.

Overall, there was strong evidence that a more flexible approach to documentation is needed in recognition of the fact that such documentation is often not available or not readily available. There are usually alternative sources of verification (such as school records) for general personal information, although it is very important that such sources be used only with the permission of the young person.

Contacting parents

The requirement that parents be contacted in cases where young people claim that they are not allowed to live at home under any condition has provided a number of problems.

First, parents may be unwilling to admit to an authority that their son or daughter cannot live at home under any condition, even when it would appear that relationships have broken down completely. There were instances in the case studies where such a refusal meant that young people had to remain at home in an intolerable situation because they were unable to survive financially away from home, and instances where young people did leave home and were forced into anti-social behaviour in order to survive.

Second, contacting parents can be emotionally painful and, in some cases, very destructive for a young person who has already faced parental rejection and/or violence.

Third, the requirement that both separated parents, however long they have been apart, should be contacted, seems to be unreasonable in cases where the absent parent may hardly be known, or be a stranger, to the child.

The issue of contacting parents raises many complex questions concerning rights, obligations and responsibilities. The guidelines for the Young Homeless Allowance recognise that it is clearly inappropriate to contact parents in cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse. The case studies suggested that it can be emotionally damaging in other instances where the young person has not had contact with parents for a period of years, for

example. While there may be cases where it is appropriate to check with parents, in other cases greater flexibility in relation to this requirement, and use of a wider range of sources of verification, would help to ensure that young people do not have to go through undue emotional pressure. Chapter 9 explores the assumptions inherent in the Young Homeless Allowance about the rights and obligations of parents and children, and the obligations of the State in relation to these.

The need for an advocate

The study revealed the important role which social workers, youth workers, refuge workers, school counsellors and student welfare officers played in the application process. Establishing a case and carrying the application through to finality, despite the barriers encountered, frequently requires skills and attributes which many young people do not have. These include self-confidence, a good working knowledge of the 'system', a little legal knowledge, tenacity, good writing and negotiating skills and the ability to search out documentary evidence. From all accounts, it has become virtually essential for applicants to have assistance from someone who is relatively familiar with the Young Homeless Allowance requirements.

The six weeks qualifying period

To qualify for the Allowance, a young person has to substantiate that she or he has lived away from home continuously for six weeks or more, without any support from parents. The severity of this requirement forces young people into a mendicant and frequently destitute and dangerous position. Since they have to show that parents are not supporting them in any way during this period, many young people approach a refuge (where there are increasingly high turn-away rates), or are forced to subsist on handouts, to rely on friends who have as few resources as they themselves have, or to sleep out. Alternatively, given the difficulties of facing six weeks with no support in order to qualify for the Allowance, they give up and decide to return to dangerous or inadequate home situations.

It is likely that some young people, left bereft or with totally inadequate resources by the six weeks requirement, may be forced into a street culture which makes it difficult for them to return home when they might well have done so given other circumstances. An additional concern for students is that they may be forced to withdraw from education and apply for Job Search Allowance when there is no other way of surviving.

There are a number of possible alternatives to the six weeks regulation:

- dropping the six weeks waiting period and providing for the Allowance to be paid from the date of application;
- providing for Special Benefit to be paid to all young people during the six weeks waiting period;
- providing for an amount equal to the Allowance to be paid to a third person or an organisation for the care of the young person for a period of a month or six weeks.

The third alternative recognises the need for an assessment period, rather than a qualifying period. A qualifying period operates to prolong or main-

tain intolerable situations, encourage school leaving and place young people in a mendicant state. An assessment period, during which an allowance would be paid to a carer on behalf of the young person, allows an assessment as to the most appropriate accommodation solution in each case. Those who would return home may be enabled to do so, while those who need alternative long-term accommodation could be referred to a suitable placement (Maas, 1986).

Continuing support from parents

The Young Homeless Allowance regulations preclude any support whatsover from parents once the young person leaves home, including money (however small the amount), food or accommodation. Combined with the six weeks qualifying period, the effect is to force young people into an impossible financial position. Generally, allowances which have an underlying assumption of independence (as the Young Homeless Allowance does) may be reduced by assistance or income from other sources, but they do not *preclude* additional assistance. If the prime consideration is the welfare of the young person, there is a strong argument for flexibility concerning parents' contribution and further consideration needs to be given to the possibility of an income free zone and shared assistance where parents can afford it.

Adequacy of the Young Homeless Allowance

There is general consensus that the amount available under the Allowance is not adequate for independent living. An amount of $76 per week is well below the poverty line for a single person. Living on such a small amount calls for skills such as budgeting, cooking and shopping which most people, adults as well as young people, just do not have. It is almost inevitable that young people's health and general welfare suffer, the quality of their lives is greatly reduced and the opportunities for the future which many of us take for granted are totally absent. The choices which are made in such a situation in order to survive often lead to self-destructive or illegal behaviour.

Young Homeless Allowance and Job Search Allowance

The introduction of the Job Search Allowance affects recipients and potential recipients of the Young Homeless Allowance. For those young people eligible for the latter, the statutory six weeks waiting period applies and the parental income test is waived: those who fail to meet the eligibility criteria have a wait of 13 weeks with no income before receiving any assistance. After three months of living on charity or whatever other means are necessary to survive, those from low income families are again eligible for $50 per week, but those from middle income families are only eligible for $25 per week. Young people in this unfortunate position then have to wait another three months to apply for exemption from the parental income test but are only eligible if they have worked for 13 weeks during that six-month period.

There is some evidence that the introduction of the Job Search Allowance has increased the application rate for the Young Homeless Allowance. Whereas eligible young people may have been able to survive in some way

on the previous rate of $50 per week junior unemployment benefit, they are certainly unable to do so on $25 per week Job Search Allowance, so there is increased incentive, or rather a more desperate motivation, to seek out the Young Homeless Allowance.

AIFS recommendations

On the basis of its case studies and discussions, the Australian Institute of Family Studies wants to see consideration given to the following four recommendations in relation to the Young Homeless Allowance (Maas and Hartley, 1987).

First, the Institute believes there is a need for more readily available information concerning the Allowance and youth homelessness, prepared with particular groups in mind. This information should be directed towards young people, taking into account problems of access related to language, skill level, cultural differences and location. Information should also be directed towards the general community and the broad range of community organisations and groups, and towards counter staff and others likely to come into contact with young homeless people, in order that they may more fully understand the problems which young people are facing.

Second, more resources should be allocated to ensure that applications are handled quickly while at the same time ensuring that a young person's rights to privacy are respected and that sufficient time is available for a sensitive assessment which takes account of an applicant's feelings.

Third, there is a pressing need to re-assess the criteria for eligibility for the Allowance and the guidelines concerning its administration so that there can be greater flexibility in provisions relating to required documentation, the source of supporting evidence, contacting parents, statements from parents and financial support from parents.

Fourth, the six weeks waiting period should be dropped or modified to avoid young people being placed into situations of destitution.

Summary

The introduction of the Young Homeless Allowance marked the first acceptance by the Commonwealth government of some responsibility for income support for young people as independent members of the community on the basis that they were not being supported by their parents. Underlying its introduction are assumptions about what are 'legitimate' reasons for young people to leave home. The legislation embodies a belief that the community accepts that, apart from clear-cut cases where no parental home exists, it is legitimate for a young person between the ages of 16 and 18 years to leave her or his parental home if she or he has been subject to sexual abuse or violence, or by remaining, is likely to be subject to personal damage similar to that experienced as a result of such abuse.

Eligibility for the Allowance in all other circumstances is dependent on parents declaring that they will not have a young person at home under any conditions, that is, if parent/s eschew all responsibilites, the young person's independent status is affirmed and legitimated. The actual reason for leaving home appears to be irrelevant. Certainly, if the parent/s are not prepared to

sign such a declaration, regardless of the circumstances or the likelihood in reality of the young person returning home, the young person's status will not be affirmed as independent.

The Institute study and the literature outlined in Chapter 3 indicate that young people are making their own judgements about what are unreasonable circumstances in which to live at home. These include extreme conflict or domestic disharmony in the household for many of the reasons outlined in Chapter 3, situations of extreme financial pressure, having to leave school in order to remain at home, and being disadvantaged as far as getting employment is concerned by staying at home. The Institute study argued that, at least as a short-term measure, the criteria for receipt of the Young Homeless Allowance should be broadened to include the above as legitimate reasons for leaving home. This would assist a number of young people who are not only finding it difficult to survive in the present, but whose futures look very bleak because they are being forced into life styles which do not help develop a positive view of the future and are often destructive.

7. Commonwealth Government Programs: Education and Training

This chapter outlines existing education and training programs as they affect homeless youth and argues that present arrangements are not likely to offer unsupported youth great hope for the future.

Education

There is no specific Commonwealth government education initiative aimed at unsupported, homeless youth. There are, however, three areas of Commonwealth support for secondary education which have the potential to assist directly such young people, or to reduce the likelihood of some young people being unsupported and homeless.

The first is through the Commonwealth's general promotion of debate about the purposes and future of education and the current moves to define, with the States, national goals for secondary education. While the Commonwealth has not been the sole initiator of such debates, the work of the Commonwealth Schools Commission (now defunct) has added to public discussion of educational issues such as curriculum content, assessment, certification, school organisation, parent participation, equity, and disadvantage of particular groups. Research outlined in Chapter 2 indicated that some young people will stay beyond the compulsory years of schooling if schools offer alternatives to a traditional academic curriculum and some flexibility in organisation. It is likely that, assisted in part by Commonwealth funds, changes in schooling have made some schools more relevant for some young people who may otherwise have left early and been at risk of getting into the cycle of unemployment, family conflict and leaving home without support.

Another area of potential Commonwealth assistance is through special purpose programs such as the Disadvantaged Schools Program. This provides additional resources for particular schools, which may assist unsupported students by providing them with education which they see as relevant and/or providing them with a range of supports to allow them to continue their education.

The third area of potential Commonwealth assistance is through the resource agreements, negotiated annually, operating between Commonwealth and States. Resource agreements provide Commonwealth monies within broad areas defined as priorities by the Commonwealth but with scope for particular State emphases. Such monies are tied to a formula based on the number of students in a State, and tend to be directed towards development of programs and resources for State education systems rather than towards individual schools.

It is possible that resource agreements in a number of areas have the potential to assist unsupported students. For example, a broadly based professional development program for teachers, or increased resources for counselling services could mean that unsupported students are identified more readily and given more support to continue their studies; resources to increase the participation of girls in maths and science could mean that individual young women develop self-esteem and a greater range of employment options and so may be less likely to leave school early.

While these three areas of assistance may contribute to better outcomes for unsupported students and those who are potentially at risk of being unsupported, much more needs to be done. Chapter 2 identified some of the ways in which schools could help — by being more aware of the circumstances of some students and by providing additional support and assistance for them to continue studying. There is a range of ways in which additional support could be given without increasing the load of overworked teachers — for example, by establishing peer support groups and strengthening contacts with youth groups, community groups and other agencies.

In addition, education systems and individual schools need to be flexible enough in their requirements to allow for new combinations of school and work, as most unsupported students are going to have to supplement an inadequate Austudy allowance or, if ineligible for Austudy, to earn a living wage.

Labour Market Programs

The following discussion looks at the potential of a number of Commonwealth-funded labour market programs to assist unsupported young people. As noted in Chapter 4, the emphasis of policy developments in this area has shifted from job creation to job training and skill development.

Australian Traineeship System

The Australian Traineeship System provides a combination of TAFE or other approved institution-based training and on-the-job training for one year, with preference given to 16–18 year-olds. The trainee is regarded as being in employment and is generally paid at the rate of 75 per cent of the junior award rate for the job. As at November 1987, 10 000 trainees had commenced training, and 12 600 positions had actually been created. Forty-five per cent of the trainees were in the private sector. It is estimated that 20 000 young people will have participated in the Australian Traineeship System in 1987–88 including 13 000 commencements (Cass, 1988). In August 1988, the Minister for Employment and Education Services stated

that another 15 000 trainees will start in 1988–89 (Media release, 23 August 1988). Although it is now apparent that the scheme is well under way, there have been considerable delays in organisation at the Commonwealth level and an uneven response on the part of the States.

The fact that traineeships are being taken up suggests that they may well provide an appropriate entry into a career for some young people. However, there have been a number of criticisms which indicate that traineeships have severe limitations as far as some unsupported, homeless young people are concerned.

Traineeships have, for example, been developed along very similar lines to that of generalised, mainstream education and training and are likely to appeal most strongly to those young people who are fairly highly motivated and who have some personal and family supports behind them; for many homeless young people, lack of supports and instability caused by accommodation difficulties will make it less likely that they will see traineeships as relevant.

Traineeships do not create jobs and are not likely to make any dent in unemployment rates for the most disadvantaged young people, which is the only way in which the majority of young homeless people are going to be assisted in the long term.

In addition, there are a number of broader concerns about the long or even medium-term effect of traineeships on the youth labour market structure. It has been suggested that those already disadvantaged in the labour market will become even more so: traineeships may become the recognised entry into some areas, by-passing normal entry by employment as a junior at the full junior award rate; they may increase gender inequities if in some areas of the labour market there is a tendency for males to be accepted into apprenticeships (which generally have a high status and rewards) and females into traineeships (which may have a lower status because of the much shorter training period).

Traineeship guidelines state that it is expected that 15 per cent of places will be filled by long-term unemployed and disadvantaged young people. A working party of the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (1987) concluded that to make this a reality a policy commitment to the recruitment and retention of the long-term unemployed and disadvantaged would be necessary. Also necessary would be: traineeships incorporating affirmative action principles in policy and practice; recruitment and selection processes that positively discriminate in favour of disadvantaged people, including preferential access by disadvantaged groups to public sector positions and ways to encourage the private sector to employ such people; and the provision of work and education environments which facilitate education and job retention through appropriate flexibility and support mechanisms for long-term unemployed and disadvantaged groups.

Jobtrain

In the 1988–89 Commonwealth Budget, what was previously known as the Youth Training Program was amalgamated with the Adult Training Program to become Jobtrain.

The Youth Training Program provided a range of short-term vocational training opportunities for unemployed people under 21 years of age. It was

the successor to earlier programs in the TAFE sector such as the Employment Program for Unemployed Youth, School to Work Transition, and the Participation and Equity Program. It was aimed at those who had been unemployed for at least six of the previous nine months and young people from groups recognised as disadvantaged in the labour market. This included some young homeless people.

Participation in the earlier programs carried with it eligibility for a small training allowance over and above unemployment benefit. However, in line with the government's strategy to equalise rates of unemployment benefit (or Job Search Allowance) and educational allowances for young people, the Youth Training Program courses carried with them no eligibility for an additional allowance. This will remain the case with Jobtrain. Participants in approved courses will be paid a Formal Training Allowance equivalent to unemployment benefit (or in the case of 16–17 year-olds, Job Search Allowance), but only those 21 years and over will receive an additional training allowance of $30.

There is thus no immediate financial incentive for young people to take on such courses. These short-term courses have the potential to assist some young homeless people, particularly as some TAFE colleges now have considerable experience in conducting courses which help young people to develop self-esteem in an educational context. However, it also seems likely that many young homeless people would find it difficult to participate because limited finances would mean that extra costs associated with the courses (for example, travel, materials and equipment) could not be met. Participation would also depend on the level of commitment a young person could sustain if he or she had little or no emotional support.

The implications for young people of the amalgamation of the two previously separate programs are yet to be seen. It is to be hoped that the joining does not result in a reduced emphasis on courses for young people.

Skillshare

On 1 January 1989, Skillshare, the Community and Youth Network for Employment and Training, will replace three previous programs aimed at the long-term unemployed — the Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS), the Community Training Program and the Community Volunteer Program. The program is designed for 'long-term unemployed people of all ages and other particularly disadvantaged groups, but with emphasis on assisting young people and those unemployed 12 months or more'; under Skillshare, community groups will sponsor programs which are 'flexible, relevant and innovative' but which provide a minimum specified amount of structured skills training (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1988:13–15).

The Community Youth Support Scheme, established in 1976, was the first program to involve local communities in initiatives for young (15–24 years) unemployed people. Despite criticisms of the Scheme over the years, CYSS centres have played an important part in providing many young people with training and experience, as well as personal support and a place to which they can feel they belong, if only temporarily. Local groups have been flexible enough to cater for a wide variety of young people, many of

whom had lost confidence in themselves and their ability to find employment.

Thus, under Skillshare there is a shift in focus from youth to a much wider age group to include all long-term unemployed people (but with an emphasis on young people). As with the amalgamation of the Youth Training Program with the Adult Training Program, it is not possible at this stage to know what effect this shift in focus will have on programs for young people. Considerable concern is expressed by CYSS workers and others concerned with youth unemployment about the Skillshare program and what appears to be its very structured nature.

If Skillshare is going to be of benefit to some unsupported, homeless young people, it is going to have to be flexible in its approach, meet a diversity of training needs and focus on skills which are seen by the participants as relevant.

Education and Training — Is It Enough?

The Commonwealth government has put considerable emphasis on the importance of retaining young people in education and an increasing emphasis on orienting labour market programs to training and the development of skills. The solutions to youth unemployment are seen to lie in more years of education and in vocationally oriented training, thus changing what the young person has to offer, rather than looking at the economic environment and the structure of the labour market, particularly the dramatic decrease in recent years in opportunities for full-time youth employment.

There is evidence that the effectiveness of an emphasis on education and training is limited and that young people continue to be substantially represented in long-term unemployment figures. A survey of youth labour market programs concluded that 'it is unlikely that education-based measures implemented outside the context of work itself will do much to change the job prospects of the disadvantaged': unless there are changes in the economic environment, labour market programs for young people will continue to turn 'optimistic program completers into new members of target groups for [further] solutions' (Rimmer, 1988:11).

The inadequacy of education and training programs in solving youth unemployment has major implications at a personal level, in terms of a young person's self-esteem, hopes for the future and, of course, immediate survival. The effect is particularly devastating for young people who are unsupported or only minimally supported by their families.

Summary

This chapter has briefly surveyed Commonwealth assistance to education and training as it effects unsupported, homeless young people. It is possible that general changes to schooling will result in some staying on at school longer than they may otherwise have done so, but there is no evidence that their particular needs for support and flexible schooling arrangements are being recognised. As far as young unemployed people are concerned, there is concern that recent changes to programs aimed at providing them with training and job skills may well mean less emphasis on their particular

needs. There are severe limitations to what can be achieved by an emphasis on education and training and a failure to look at the structure of the labour market as a cause of youth unemployment.

8. Groups With Special Needs

It has become increasingly apparent that the particular needs of some unsupported, homeless young people are not met by policies which do not take account of such factors as gender, cultural background, geographic location and other personal and social background situations. This chapter outlines the special needs of some young people which have been discussed in the literature, with the aim of giving some indications of factors which need to be considered if appropriate policies are to be developed.

It is important to note that while a focus on special needs of particular groups may serve to emphasise some needs which are different from those of other groups, for any individual it may obscure other needs. For example, while young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds are included in this discussion as a particular group, they are obviously not a homogeneous group who share the same needs; within the group the circumstances of young women are likely to be different from those of young men, and more recent arrivals will have different needs from those who are relatively long settled. So, while this chapter looks at 'special needs', it should not be read as an argument for categorising young people. Rather, the aim is to have greater consideration of individual needs.

Young Women

Although there is little detailed research which focuses specifically on the reasons why young women leave home, there is evidence to suggest that the changing nature of female roles and the social expectations placed on young women significantly affect their experiences of the transition to independence, and also that their patterns of leaving home are somewhat different from those of young males.

Compared with young males, young women are more likely to be unemployed and remain unemployed for longer periods, less likely to be in education or training, more likely to be found in marginal part-time work and more likely to be seeking employment in a limited range of areas. They are much more likely to be the victims of specific sexual abuse, or to become involved in relationships which are physically or psychologically abusive. In

addition, because of persisting social attitudes which still equate being female with domesticity and dependency, young women are more likely to be among the 'hidden unemployed'. The overall effect is one of increased vulnerability to homelessness and more likelihood of being judged 'at risk' in situations which are not of their own making.

Young (1987:21) found that daughters tended to leave home earlier than sons and that sons were more likely than daughters to return home (before leaving again) — that is, 'the departure of daughters commences earlier and takes place over a shorter period of time'. Although there is little detailed information about reasons why younger females leave home, particularly those who become homeless, youth housing workers identify unemployment, family conflict, domestic violence, sexual abuse, desire for independence, parental separation, and poverty as important reasons (NYCH, 1987). When young women leave home, they are more vulnerable than young men because of the greater possibility of being unemployed and because they are more likely to be subject to exploitation by males. The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Review notes the greater perecentage of females of younger ages who are seeking help in refuges (Chesterman, 1988).

The needs of homeless young women and young women 'at risk' in relation to appropriate accommodation and a range of support services, are outlined in several recent reports (NYCH, 1987; NSW, 1986; Winlaton Deinstitutionalisation Working Party, 1986). The survey of young women's access to supported accommodation conducted by the National Youth Coalition for Housing found that fewer young women than men are assisted by such services. While the number of referrals to the services surveyed Australia-wide in the period between July 1986 and June 1987 was the same for both males and females, the number of males actually accommodated or supported in some way by the services exceeded the number of young women. The difference remained even when the statistics for young women-only services were subtracted (NYCH, 1987). This evidence becomes even more pertinent when it is remembered that there is a tendency for young women not to approach refuges because they do not see them as appropriate.

It is clear then that the present system of supported accommodation is not serving the needs of many young women. The NYCH report identifies young women's need for security as an important aspect in providing suitable services. Mixed-gender services are frequently male-dominated and aggressive environments, perhaps exactly the sort of environment from which, in leaving home, some young women are trying to escape. Even if they have left home for reasons other than male violence and aggression, they may be subject to harrassment and exploitation in a refuge.

The NYCH report identified a range of services which young women require and also found that existing services did not cater adequately for young pregnant women, young women with dependents, and young women with disabilities. The Institute report on the Young Homeless Allowance concluded that, given the vulnerability of many young women to situations of exploitation, it was important that information concerning the Allowance was readily available in schools as well as through other groups and agencies which may come into contact with homeless young women. In addition, the community generally needed to be made aware of the situa-

tions in which many young women find themselves. An extension of the Young Homeless Allowance eligibility criteria to include a notion of threat to psychological or emotional wellbeing would make it possible for some young women to leave intolerable situations and be financially supported.

Victims of Sexual Abuse

It is virtually impossible to estimate numbers of young people (overwhelmingly young women) who are victims of sexual abuse, or to say what proportion of young women leave home because of sexual abuse. Following interviews with staff of a broad range of Youth Supported Accommodation Program services across all States, the SAAP Review noted: 'There appears to be a higher incidence (or a greater awareness) of the extent of violence to or sexual abuse of young girls. The majority of female clients profiled by service workers had experienced some form of violence or sexual abuse prior to their stay in a SAAP service' (Chesterman, 1988:51).

In 1987, 3 per cent of the young people receiving the Young Homeless Allowance in Victoria were recorded as leaving home because of sexual abuse (Department of Social Security, Victoria, 1987). However, while young people who have been subject to sexual abuse, or who live in a house where they are aware that another member of the family is subject to sexual abuse, are eligible for the Young Homeless Allowance, there are a number of factors which operate against the benefit being available to many who need it.

First, as indicated earlier, for reasons including guilt, shame, lack of information about what to do, fear and desire to protect family members, many young people are reluctant to talk of their situation with someone outside the family; they therefore remain at risk in the family. If they do apply for the Allowance, it is possible that there will not be documented evidence of their situation in the form of reports from a social worker and agency because of their reluctance to seek such assistance.

Second, there was evidence in the Institute study of the Young Homeless Allowance that some young women are reluctant to report sexual abuse within the family because they believe that they may be taken into care by State welfare authorities. For this reason they will not report cases of sexual abuse or lay charges until they are over the age of 18 years.

While significant changes in each of the above areas are very long term and will only come as a result of a major shift in societal values as well as shifts in the policies of State government departments, at this stage every effort should be made to ensure that victims of sexual abuse do not face barriers which arise from departmental procedures when they apply for assistance, including the Young Homeless Allowance.

Young People of Non-English-speaking Background

The nature of a breakdown in relationships between parents and children has some similarities across cultures, but the factors which precipitate the breakdown, the responses of parents and young people, and the meaning and implications of such a breakdown are likely to vary across cultures.

In 1985 the Youth Accommodation Association of New South Wales (previously the Youth Refuge and Accommodation Association) suggested that the needs of homeless youth from non-English-speaking backgrounds were not being catered for by existing services (Youth Refuge and Accommodation Association NSW, 1985). A recent project on the assets and aspirations of ethnic youth found anecdotal evidence to suggest that use of emergency accommodation by ethnic youth is on the increase (Cahill and Ewen, 1987). Youth workers and school counsellors who were consulted for the Institute study confirmed the concern that ethnic youth were not being catered for and their particular needs not understood.

Access of youth from non-English-speaking backgrounds to information about services which do exist is a major issue. There have been some efforts to produce information in languages other than English, but in general detailed information is not available. Having information available in community languages and appropriate channels for distribution of information is crucial if there is to be equity of access, but this is only a first step. There are very few accommodation services with the resources to cater especially for young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Lack of English skills is only one of the potential problems faced by such young people; others include limited support networks, particularly if leaving home goes against strong cultural mores, limited access to community services, limited employment opportunities and anxiety about social isolation, all of which increases the trauma experienced in a crisis such as leaving home.

Underlying the issues of provision for these unsupported young people is the debate on the best strategies to ensure equity of access. Should there be provision of separate and specific services, or should the emphasis be on making sure that mainstream services respond to a diversity of needs? The SAAP Review paper on immigrant and refugee access to the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program detailed a number of issues which restricted the access of these groups to existing services. While the issues were not specifically to do with youth services, they are almost certainly relevant. Restriction included mainstream policies which failed to acknowledge the difficulties of providing essential skilled assistance, the almost total lack of appropriate training for service workers, the lack of easily accessible skilled and appropriate interpreter services, and the limited data on users from non-English-speaking backgrounds (Meekosha and Jakubowicz, 1987).

Eligibility criteria for the Young Homeless Allowance, which carry the implicit assumption that certain reasons for leaving home are legitimate and others are not, provide particular problems. In a multicultural society, which at least to some extent implies the rights of people to live by their own cultural norms and the acceptance of those cultural norms by others, decisions about what might and what might not be reasonable expectations for young people in families, are not going to be easy. The Young Homeless Allowance guidelines give an example of one cultural conflict (a forced marriage) which is acceptable as making it 'unreasonable to live at home' (Department of Social Security, 1987). However, the issue of cultural conflict is left unclear and it is obvious that as far as eligibility for the Young Homeless Allowance is concerned, much clearer guidelines need to be established.

Aborigines

The National Youth Coalition for Housing sought to ascertain the number of young people applying for the Young Homeless Allowance who identified as Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander. Only a handful of survey returns referred to young Aboriginal persons (in Tasmania or Queensland).

There is an obvious and important distinction to be made between Aborigines living in remote areas and in urban areas, and a consequent difference in what are considered relevant services. The SAAP Review notes that in remote Aboriginal communities, homelessness is a foreign concept as no Aborigine is ever without family, kin or ties to an area (Chesterman, 1988).

Information gathered by the National Youth Coalition for Housing suggested that young Aboriginal people in urban areas are more likely to be reliant on the Social Security benefit of an adult, not necessarily a parent, than to be on a benefit themselves. Their pattern of homelessness is likely to be somewhat different from that of non-Aboriginal youth. If they are not with parents, they usually go to a relative or tend to move around between relatives and to be reliant on whatever income that person has. While being with relatives can be seen as a positive position for young people to be in, it obscures the fact that it may result in a heavy financial burden for the carer(s), with no additional financial support to offset the additional costs.

In the Western Australian evaluation of SAAP services, Gevers (1987) reported that young Aborigines avoid non-Aboriginal services, prefering to sleep out rather than risk rejection or face racism from mainstream services. Not surprisingly, they prefer services run *by* Aborigines *for* Aborigines.

Fear of authority, as well as lack of access to information, and cultural and language barriers, often mean that young Aborigines are not on unemployment benefit, or if they have been in the past, they are unlikely to regain it. Hence, if living arrangements break down, they have little option but to live on the streets. They frequently leave school earlier than non-Aborigines because schools do not meet their needs. The next step can be apprehension for a series of petty crimes, and the path to institutionalisation has begun.

The Young Homeless Allowance provisions do not take account of the situation of many homeless Aboriginal young people who lack information about the Allowance and are not automatically told by Department of Social Security staff that they may be eligible. Aboriginal youth are perhaps even more reluctant than some non-Aboriginal youth to go through the application process because the personal questions which they are required to answer about their parents and families are seen as very intrusive, and because of an understandable fear of white authority. Establishing a case can be seen as too difficult, and unless they have a strong advocate, negotiating a system which they see as hostile and alien is very intimidating.

In both rural and urban areas, there are young Aboriginal people who are eligible for unemployment benefit but who are not receiving it which renders them ineligible for the Young Homeless Allowance.

If Aboriginal youth are not to be denied equal access to the Allowance, increased efforts by government authorities to liaise with Aboriginal agencies and community groups will need to be made in order to establish the particular needs of Aboriginal young people.

Young People in Rural and Isolated Areas

The following outline draws on a research report on the urban accommodation needs of young country people undertaken by the Youth Accommodation Coalition for the Victorian Youth Policy Development Council (Breen, 1987).

Breen discusses the main reasons why young country people move to the city. In addition to family conflict and domestic violence, he mentions the lack of opportunities in the rural labour market which force young people to look to urban areas. Even when special development projects are introduced into country centres, it does not mean that there will be appropriate accommodation available for young people. On the contrary, importation of skilled workers for the duration of the project can mean that young people on low incomes have reduced access to the usually limited amount of accommodation available. Fewer opportunities exist for young people from rural areas to study and remain living in their local areas, and there are often accommodation difficulties in larger regional centres. In rural communities, usually less anonymous than urban communities, some young people have to cope with the censure of public opinion and may well decide to leave the area rather than face possible hostility and rejection. Such young people could include, for example, young pregnant women, ex-offenders, young people saddled with the negative reputation which their family has in the district, and young homosexual people. And finally, as Breen notes, there is the positive attraction of city 'bright lights'.

Once in the city, Breen says, young country people face the same problems as other young people in finding suitable and affordable accommodation, but with the additional difficulties of lack of familiarity with the city and its resources, limited or no information or friendship networks, and in some cases a greater naivety than young people brought up in the city. Breen identifies students, unemployed young people and those on low wages as facing the greatest difficulties. Apprentices and junior wage earners are frequently forced to spend high proportions of their income on accommodation and hence have inadequate resources left for other basics such as food, clothing and health costs.

The Institute study noted that young people's lack of access to information about available assistance was a major area of concern and gave instances of youth welfare workers in remote areas who would normally be expected to come into contact with homeless youth, not knowing of the existence of the Young Homeless Allowance. Youth workers consulted in the Institute study reported that alternative accommodation and general support services were less readily available in country areas, hence young people are often forced to stay in unsatisfactory home situations or to move out with little knowledge of the assistance which they may be able to get.

Available research indicates that a great many young country people do not really want to move to urban areas and do so only to increase their options.

Refugees

In the late 1970s, numbers of Indo-Chinese adolescents (predominantly males) began to arrive in Australia unaccompanied by their parents. Con-

cern has been expressed about the circumstances of such young people. Refugee minors who have been accepted for resettlement in Australia and who are not accompanied by a parent, are classified as 'unattached minors' if they are *not* in the care of, or proceeding to a close relative, or 'detached minors' if they *are* in the care of, or proceeding to a close relative. Unattached minors enter Australia as wards of the Minister for Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs; detached minors are not wards.

Causing increasing concern is a third category of refugee minors comprising those who originally entered Australia as detached minors but whose care arrangements with relatives have broken down. The proportion in this position is estimated to be up to 50 per cent (Indo China Refugee Association, 1987). Research evidence indicates that many supporting relatives are not in a position to support extra young people and that kinship ties are not close, or in some cases, actually non-existent (Zulfacar, 1984; State Working Party on Refugee Children, 1984).

The Indo China Refugee Association (1987) found no consensus on whether Indo-Chinese 'street kids' consisted mainly of unattached and detached youth. It was suggested that some of those 'at risk' were young people who had dropped out of school through frustration with their inability to catch up, and those who had been too old on arrival to go into the education system. It was generally acknowledged that there was a large group of predominantly male, highly mobile unsupported youth with little or no knowledge of available community support.

Refugee youth are automatically eligible for the Young Homeless Allowance if they have been granted refugee status, if neither natural parent is living in Australia, and if they have not been adopted under Australian law (Department of Social Security, 1987). However, it is likely that some young people who are eligible are not receiving the Allowance, because they do not know that they are eligible, they are reluctant to approach the authorities or they cannot read the forms.

Young refugees whose care arrangements have broken down face enormous difficulties, not only in finding suitable accommodation and enough income to live on, but also in coping with the traumas often associated with leaving their home country and the rejection and racism which they encounter in Australia. While some of their needs for support are similar to those of any young person living independently, they have particular needs for English language instruction, education, employment information and strategies, counselling and general emotional support (Indo China Refugee Association, 1987; Maas, 1986).

Young People With a History of Institutionalisation

Two particular groups of young people are included here — those who have spent significant periods of time in 'protective' or 'correctional' care, and those who have been in institutions because of intellectual or other disability.

With policies of de-institutionalisation, it is likely that increasing numbers of young people who have spent a substantial part of their life in institutions will become homeless. Young offenders and institutionalised young people face major barriers to finding employment: apart from the shortage of

appropriate jobs, they face discriminatory employment practices, discriminatory labour market opportunities, and the disadvantages of inappropriate educational experience (Griffiths, 1988). Read and Alder (1988) found that the employment experiences of young people released from Youth Training Centres in Victoria were affected by the effects of institutionalisation and lack of familiarity with the world of work, emotional and personality problem, lack of personal support in adjusting to work, and actual or perceived prejudice from others in the work place.

These factors and the scarcity of appropriate and affordable accommodation make the position of formerly institutionalised young people very precarious.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the special needs of groups of young people identified as having particular needs which are not always met by 'mainstream' provision. In essence, discussion of 'special needs' and 'particular groups' is an argument for a greater range of youth services which takes account of individual needs.

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9. Policy Issues

Before discussing possible policy directions for unsupported youth, there are a number of issues concerning youth and independence which need to be clarified.

Over 80 per cent of young people aged between 15 and 19 years live with parent(s). By ages 20 to 24 years, the percentage of young people living at home has decreased to less than 40 per cent for females and around 50 per cent for males (Kilmartin, 1987). It is not known of course how many of these young people would prefer to live independently from parent(s), nor how many would choose to do so given different circumstances.

Young people have always sought independence from their families and will continue to do so. Patterns will change, but at any point in history there is likely to be a predominant pattern as well as a range of ways in which they do this. The challenge is to make decisions which are appropriate to the needs of those who are unsupported and lack resources to make a positive transition. Such decisions must not only respond to the obvious needs of young people and their families at present, but must also lay the basis for better solutions in the future.

Dilemmas confronting the community regarding the needs of unsupported young people stem from two issues:

- The extent to which the leaving home patterns of a sub-group of young people should bestow upon them the status normally accorded to fully independent members of society.
- How the responsibility for the wellbeing of this group should be apportioned among the young people themselves, their families of origin, and the community generally, including Commonwealth and State governments.

Legitimating Premature Independence

The first dilemma, that of accepting and legitimating the leaving home circumstances of many young people, underpins some of the eligibility criteria for the Young Homeless Allowance, the introduction of which required the government to make some decisions as to what were seen as

'legitimate' reasons for young people to leave home and receive support as a result.

The eligibility criteria reflect a view that, apart from clear-cut cases where no parental home exists, it is legitimate for a young person between the ages of 16 and 18 years to leave the parental home if he or she has been subject to sexual abuse or violence or, by remaining, is likely to experience such abuse.

In order to establish the truth of claims regarding such circumstances, government departments require in addition to the statement of the young person, supporting evidence from qualified sources such as State welfare authorities, police and medical agencies. In these instances, satisfied with the evidence presented, departmental officers are empowered to grant eligibility and do not have to seek verification from parents. In effect, government officials are bestowing legitimacy upon the status of such young people as being independent of their parents, that is, allowing those parents no further claim on the control and direction of their children. The associated issues as to whether society should be holding those parents to account for their behaviour or determining the extent to which there should be continued parental responsibility for upkeep, are not given any consideration under the provisions of the Young Homeless Allowance.

The discretion of determining officers is more limited under the provision whereby a young person is not permitted by parents to live at home under any circumstances. Here, any parent, whether previously living with the young person or not, must be contacted and required to sign a declaration that they will not allow the child to live with them and will not support her/him in any way. Where parents agree to so declare, then the status of being independent is again affirmed and legitimated for the young person. However, where parents will not agree to sign away their rights and responsibilities, regardless of the actual circumstances of the young person and the likelihood in reality of her/him ever returning to the parental home, no legitimacy is accorded to her/his status as being independent.

Apportioning Responsibility

The second dilemma, that of how to apportion responsibility for homeless youth, is resolved upon the granting or denying of the Young Homeless Allowance. Granting eligibility means validating independent status, the tangible expression of which is the payment of a government benefit. Society says it will take responsibility for such young people in need and their parents' responsibility implicitly no longer exists.

For those young people whose eligibility is denied, the dilemma is resolved by refusing to shift the responsibility for care and wellbeing away from the parents. In cases where no parental assistance is forthcoming, that responsibility passes to the young person and to anyone in the community prepared to shoulder part of it, usually welfare agencies or friends. Very often the result is a resort to crime, prostitution and exploitation.

State versus parental responsibility

Outcomes whereby responsibility for the care of young people passes to the

state are consistent with two recent legal cases, one in Australia and the other in the United Kingdom.

The Australian case involved the appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in the case of Spooner (discussed in Chapter 4). The Tribunal took the view that the wellbeing of the young person was paramount and third parties such as the Commonwealth government should not deny assistance on the grounds that a child take legal action to ensure parental support.

The British case involved the attempt by a Mrs Gillick to deny the right of local health authorities to provide contraceptive or abortion advice to her daughters while aged under 16 years. After a tortuous and evenly divided legal process, the issue was resolved in the House of Lords by the narrowest of margins against Mrs Gillick. The judgement included the observation that parental rights continue 'only so long as they are needed for the protection of the person and property of the child' (Harrison, 1987).

In each of the cases, the prime consideration was seen to be the wellbeing of the child, rather than the responsibility of the parents, or the ability or willingness of parents to meet these responsibilities. The granting of the Young Homeless Allowance because of danger to young people or the refusal of parents to provide for their care would seem to be consistent with the outcomes of these cases.

In contrast, the emphasis in the recently introduced legislation regarding changes to maintenance provisions under the Family Law Act seems to be on firmly asserting that the responsibility for the wellbeing of children should fall mainly on parents, with State support being available only when all efforts to secure adequate parental support are exhausted. Similarly, the abolition of unemployment benefit for under 18 year-olds and the introduction of parental income testing for the replacement Job Search Allowance appear to be signals that the Commonwealth government expects families to bear more of the responsibility for the care of young people up to the age of 18 years.

Prolonged Dependence and Reduced Responsibility

How is sense to be made of these conflicting and confusing developments? Economic and social conditions have developed whereby employment opportunities traditionally available to young people have rapidly disappeared, producing the now long-standing problem of youth unemployment. There has been an evolution of government policies to the point where emphasis is now placed on education or training, rather than participation in the labour market, for those aged 16 to 18 years. Young people, their families and the community are being encouraged to accept the view that the only appropriate place for members of this age group is in education or training of some kind and not in the labour market. The inevitable consequence of this approach is the lengthening of the period of youth dependence.

At the same time, turbulent economic conditions, the emergence of such problems as unemployment generally and the growth of numbers of families living in poverty have led to increasingly fragile family relationships and consequent changes in both the capacity and willingness of families to carry responsibility for dependents' care and wellbeing.

Governments face the problem of developing strategies which provide for the care of unsupported individuals, without further weakening the fabric of the system of private care and responsibility. In this, it is important that attention be paid to the possible undesirable side effects of such strategies.

Family Law Versus Unsupported Youth Policies

Current policy approaches regarding unsupported youth appear not to have been thought through or taken as seriously as other areas of policy. Many of the issues relating to this problem are analogous to problems encountered in family law. Both marriage breakdown and youth homelessness are forms of family break-up. In the case of divorce and separation an elaborate legal apparatus applies. An extensive, and expensive, system of courts exists along with a vast array of professionals and support staff. Every effort is made to provide for equitable outcomes and especially to promote the wellbeing of those involved, in particular those who are most at risk. The economic wellbeing of adults is negotiated, with former spouses, and children, making claims on joint assets. Attention is paid to the ongoing circumstances of children especially. Recent changes to this area have seen a strong re-assertion of the continuing responsibilities of parents for children.

Moving beyond the Family Court arena, government agencies, both State and Commonwealth, invest vast resources and efforts in addressing the needs of sole-parent families in need. Income security, public housing and now employment, training and child care programs, are increasingly being designed to assist such families.

The contrast with the situation for unsupported youth is stark. The government apparatus that exists to assist these young people is fragmented at best, lacking direction and clear purpose, is chronically under-resourced and adversarial in nature. Responsibility is spread between government departments. The level of staffing to address young people's needs is inadequate and unprepared for its tasks. The Young Homeless Allowance was expected to add only $1.2 million to unemployment and special benefit outlays in 1986–87 and 1987–88 (Commonwealth of Australia, 1986), with the main burden of assistance falling to community agencies. Requirements for proof of circumstances for applicants are strict and onerous (reminiscent of the proofs of 'adultery' and 'cruelty' required to demonstrate 'fault' under the old Matrimonial Causes Act replaced by the Family Law Act). Once the stringent eligibility tests are passed, assistance is parsimonious. Apart from the overwhelmed refuge network, no extra assistance is provided in the crucial areas of housing, education or personal support. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the community regards the problems facing homeless teenagers as trivial when compared with those of marriage failure.

Adults or Children?

A major difficulty in developing policy approaches to the needs of unsupported, homeless young people relates to whether they should be regarded as children or adults. Under Family Law, the claims of children to matrimonial property are subsumed within the claims of the former partners to a

marriage. For children, it is assumed that subsequent claims to family assets would be looked at on the death of parents or as a result of later negotiation between parents and children when the child becomes an adult. Yet as a child, a young person has a right to continued support from both parents up to the age of 18 years or upon leaving education.

On the other hand, a homeless young person appears to have no enforceable rights to continued support from parents. It could be argued that either there is a case for such rights to be provided for, or that such a young person should be regarded as an adult with some claims to the assets of his or her family. In either case, the legal claim would have to be provided for and some State apparatus established to adjudicate.

The conundrum of adult or child is also evident in the attempts by State and Commonwealth agencies to determine their respective responsibilities for unsupported youth, with most difficulty evident around the age of 15 years. Until recently, Commonwealth authorities were most reluctant to assist 15 year-olds as they regarded them as the traditional responsibility of State welfare departments, as legally they are up to the age of 18 years if they meet the criteria for State wardship. Equally determined to sheet responsibility home to the Commonwealth, State departments have argued that as the minimum school leaving age is 15 years in all parts of Australia (except Tasmania where it is 16 years), the Commonwealth has the responsibility of income support of all those over that age (Maas, 1986).

There appears to have been a tacit agreement that the States should assume full responsibility for those below age 15 years, while the Commonwealth should address the needs of older teenagers. While this may let the States off the hook to a degree, the policies of the Commonwealth do not clearly resolve the riddle of age and adult status. This is because it is not until the age of 21 that full adult rights are accorded to those in need of income support. (It was only in 1985 that this age limit was raised from 18 years.) Up until the age of 21 years, and for students up to the age of 24 years, those living in the parental home are deemed to be in receipt of in-kind transfers, except under certain exceptions such as marriage, wardship, or previous work-related independence. Consequently, it is only as a result of living away from the family residence that genuine independence can be considered and even then more hurdles must be cleared. In the case of young people claiming the status of 'unsupported', they have to meet the eligibility criteria for the Young Homeless Allowance as described earlier.

However, even in the case of young people being deemed as legitimately independent, the Commonwealth does not accord them full adult status. The 1988 independent rate of income assistance for 16 year-olds is $76 per week while the intermediate rate (18–21 years) is $91.20 and the adult rate (over 21 years) is $108.40 (for the first 6 months of the year). The only conclusion that can be drawn is that officials believe either that living costs are lower for younger people than for over 21 year-olds, or that there are hidden transfers from families to the younger group that don't exist for the older group. No empirical evidence exists to support either assumption, nor has either case been convincingly argued.

Complications With the Job Search Allowance

The problem of when a young person becomes an adult was further compounded with developments in the area of assistance to the unemployed and to students. The measures introduced in 1985 were aimed at simplifying a complex system of payments, shifting emphasis to age in recognition of the increased costs of older teenagers, eradicating disparities that were perceived to favour unemployment over study, and recognising independence in the case of unsupported youth via the Young Homeless Allowance. The underlying theme of the measures was to emphasise the development of autonomy for young people. On 13 May 1987, the Commonwealth completely reversed these signals by abolishing unemployment benefit for under 18 year-olds and replacing it, as from January 1988, with the Job Search Allowance paid at half the rate of the former unemployment benefit plus another half payable upon the passing of a parental income test. In addition, no payment is made for 13 weeks after leaving school.

Before this development, the status of a young person in the labour market was clear. As workers, they were regarded as autonomous members of society, and if unemployed there was no overt presumption of dependence on parents (as there was no family income test), unlike the situation for students. Of course, assistance was set at such as low rate that no young person could survive without extra help, a fact which led to the introduction of the Young Homeless Allowance as a tacit acceptance of the implicit status of junior unemployment benefit as being a supplement to family support.

The introduction of Job Search Allowance indicates that even those who have worked are not being regarded as autonomous citizens until the age of 18 years because those living with their parents are reduced to receiving only $25 per week if their families are in receipt of incomes above the cut-off point.

Summary

There are a number of issues which both government and the community need to consider before consistent and appropriate policies concerning unsupported, homeless young people begin to be developed. These include the circumstances under which young people are considered to be independent of their parents, the relative rights and responsibilities of young people and their parents, and the apportioning of responsibility for unsupported young people.

Current government policies present a somewhat confusing and contradictory picture, although the meagre allowances available to unsupported young people indicate that those under 18 years are increasingly being seen as a family responsibility.

10. Short-term and Long-term Strategies

There is no doubting the complexity of issues regarding unsupported youth which faces government at a time of rapid social and economic change. A great deal of effort has gone into revamping the education and training systems and into support for these systems. There are casualties of change however, and young people and their families, especially those from low income groups, are caught up in these processes possibly more than families from any other sector.

Consequently, it is important to pay continued and considered attention to problems emerging as the processes of change go on. The suggestions contained in this Policy Background Paper do mean greater allocation of resources into certain areas and such proposals are certainly not likely to be embraced enthusiastically by any government faced with pressures to reduce spending. Yet it is argued that the Commonwealth government could and should gain the community support necessary to provide greater assistance to those who are currently the unfortunate victims of the times — those young people who are the subject of this report. Such a firmer commitment to assisting young people might involve a short and a longer term set of policy strategies.

Short-term Strategies

The immediate needs of homeless young people are income support, accommodation, personal support, access to work or worthwhile education and training. Changes to the system of administering the Young Homeless Allowance are needed, as is an extension of accommodation programs, particularly minimally supported accommodation, and the development of training and work preparation schemes which have built into them an understanding of the needs of young people and ways to ensure their participation.

It is clear that the system of assisting young people needs fundamental overhaul. This report has identified the following as ways of redressing the shortcomings in the Young Homeless Allowance:

- The addition of such criteria as 'extreme domestic disharmony', 'severe economic hardship', 'forced to leave school', and 'enforced locational

moves' would address many of the clearly untenable situations faced by young people; at present, eligibility criteria are too narrow and exclude many young people in need of assistance.

- An alternative to the six-week waiting period — such as no waiting period or payment during an assessment period — needs to be found to prevent genuine cases experiencing severe economic hardship while waiting for assistance.
- The nature and sources of acceptable supporting evidence need to be broadened and treated more flexibly.
- The possibility of some level of parental assistance should not be precluded. The introduction of a 'free zone' would bring the Young Homeless Allowance in line with other types of benefit such as Supporting Parents Benefit and unemployment benefit.
- Greater attention needs to be paid to the level of general awareness of the existence of the Allowance, including the use of a greater diversity of information sources, the use of languages other than English, seminars and workshops for professionals, the involvement of specific community-based groups, and an emphasis on particular ethnic and cultural concerns.
- A review of government assessment procedures and resources is needed in order to minimise lengthy turn-around times, inefficient handling of claims and insensitive and inappropriate treatment of claimants.
- Rights need to be accorded to young people regarding confidentiality of case material, privacy in giving information, and availability of file data to claimants.
- The development of the role of youth advocates attached to the community sector would ensure that the rights of eligible young people are protected and the efficiency of the assessment procedures improved.
- Further research efforts should be made to determine the actual level of need faced by independent young people. It is clear that the present level of Allowance forces young people into poverty.

This, however, is only a beginning. If the needs of homeless young people are to be taken seriously, much more attention has to be paid to the provision of suitable accommodation. It is known that refuges turn away up to 80 per cent of those in need of shelter, that large numbers of homeless youth do not even present for assistance and that every night a significant number of young people are accommodated in totally inappropriate general services. Affordable, suitable housing is essential for all citizens. With a recognition that housing needs change throughout the life cycle, and that there is now considerable variety in family structures, it makes good sense to explore seriously a range of housing alternatives suited to young people's needs.

Unsupported students

Policy responses to the needs of those who leave school early and then leave home must embrace a number of areas. These young people have acute needs for income support; they require access to affordable and suitable accommodation and they need much more relevant and supportive educational or training options than have traditionally been available to them through academically oriented secondary school systems. Members of this

group have attracted considerable attention in recent years, with measures such as the Australian Traineeship System and recent income support measures being directed partly towards them. However, as outlined in Chapter 7, the manner in which traineeships have been implemented has excluded many young people in this group.

Many young people are unsupported students primarily because of the breakdown of their families. The impact of family dissolution may be experienced by such young people at different periods and for different reasons. It may be soon after the parents separate and when the unsettling and traumatic effects of establishing new patterns are too much for parent–child relationships already made fragile by the normal adolescent processes of development. It may be the result of economic pressures following family breakdown. Economic problems faced by female-headed single-parent families in particular, especially when employment is not available to or not possible for the mother, may force some young people out of school and home. Repartnering of the custodial parent often brings new tensions into families. Parent–child relationships which have been re-negotiated following the separation of parents are again subject to severe strains.

Many young people caught up in such situations may well have continued their secondary education had their families remained intact — there would have been no pull of the workforce or push to leave home. However, those who do leave home are often forced to leave school because of lack of finances to continue their education rather than a lack of desire to do so.

Accommodation needs of unsupported students vary according to age and the possession of independent living skills. It is inappropriate for homeless students to stay all but the shortest period of time in emergency accommodation. For younger students, either substitute families or small, supervised homes, preferably situated in locations close to students' home areas, are probably the most suitable forms of accommodation. For more mature young people, supervised small-group hostel accommodation or independent living are viable options. In either case, education and welfare authorities should be responsible for the provision of appropriate support structures to assist with problems concerned with studies, personal and financial management and domestic organisation.

Unsupported at home

While the focus of this Policy Background Paper has been on young people living away from their families, it is important to register concern for those students who may still live with their parent(s) but who receive no support from them.

Such cases include young people who have had to leave school early and seek work or draw the Job Search Allowance because their families would not or could not support the cost of continued education, and young people actually continuing their studies while contributing a full share to household costs. Powles (1986:4) found such cases in her study of the financial arrangements between TAFE students and their families: 'Students in this sub-category live at home as if entirely independently. This is strongly related to family type (for example, single parent) and economic circumstances (for example, parents out of work)'.

Policy approaches to this group's needs would centre mainly on income support for students and their families. Extra effort to support students while still at home would reduce the need for approaches that aim at supporting students independently.

Young people under 15 years

Young people who leave home under the school leaving age are cause for considerable concern. If they lose the support of their families at a young enough age they might find their way into the formal systems of alternative care administered by State welfare authorities and be admitted to wardship.

As State authorities are moving away from policies of residential care and placing increasing emphasis on support schemes for families, they are increasingly reluctant to devote resources to programs that may be regarded as youth income support schemes. The States attribute increased family breakdown to ineffective Commonwealth government economic policies which have failed to alleviate unemployment, and to inadequate income support measures which have contributed to both family and youth poverty, and argue that the States should not have to expand their traditional function of caring for children and youth who are at risk because of family neglect or stress. To support many of those designated as unsupported students, particularly to maintain their status as students, is regarded as an unwarranted extension of State responsibilities.

Conversely, Commonwealth officials have made it clear that their departments would be most reluctant to extend any support programs to groups younger than age 16 years. Consequently, under 15 year-olds must rely on the varying conditions of support existing under State and Territory administrations.

The needs of unsupported students aged 12–15 years probably differ considerably from those of older age groups. These young people require greater supervision and care and consequently are in need of appropriate supported accommodation in addition to educational support structures that are sympathetic to their circumstances.

Personal support structures

Even if unsupported young people manage to survive physically and continue to attend school, they need the emotional and personal support that a student at home might be expected to receive from parents. Consequently, any future accommodation scheme should pay particular attention to the personal support needs of such youth.

Both educational institutions and community agencies could provide support structures for young, unsupported people. Student welfare staff in schools and TAFE colleges need to be aware of the particular pressures on young people living without the support of parents and, through them, the broader community of administrators and teachers should be alerted to the needs of this group.

School support systems need to be linked with others in the community. Youth workers and community programs aimed at assisting young people should be aware of the problems experienced by unsupported students and

able to assist such youth in their needs for welfare assistance, advocacy with government agencies, information regarding provision of services such as health care, legal advice and financial assistance, and leisure and recreation. It may be possible for Commonwealth and State governments to encourage the development of some examples of locally coordinated services which include school and community-based programs that provide for the needs of unsupported students as part at least of their operations. Alternatively, State government youth bureaux might develop approaches which improve the coordination of school and community support services.

Long-term Strategies

In developing appropriate policies for unsupported youth in the longer term, attention should be paid to the conditions that contribute to young people leaving home permanently. As the community gradually comes to grips with the existence and the causes of sexual abuse and domestic violence, it is to be hoped that fewer young people will be presenting at emergency services as a result.

Legislation in some States is beginning to reflect changes in community awareness and to take account of some suggestions made by those who have worked closely with young people and their families. Again, there are indications that problems of financial stress may be lessened for some families by the new Family Assistance Scheme which will provide a significant cash increase for low income families with children. Perhaps fewer youth will be forced to leave home to alleviate financial stress and less conflict will be generated through such problems. However, serious poverty traps remain, particularly for sole-parent families. Moreover, families with children generally are under stress, and it will be important to examine ways in which other than low income families can be assisted in the task of raising the next generation, otherwise the problems now more acutely felt by low income groups will be increasingly spread across income groups.

There is also a need for the development of new policies regarding both the supply of more appropriate housing stock and the provision of affordable financing options for families, for individuals and for groups, such as community rental cooperatives.

Families and young people are in need of assistance in negotiating the changed circumstances under which independence must now be gained. Much of the struggle reported in the literature stems from the breakdown of established pathways to independence such as work or the establishment of new families. Prolonged dependence of young people at a time when the possibilities of acting responsibly are becoming limited, is placing new stresses on family processes.

Strategies to address these new stressful situations could include community-based programs available through schools or local discussion groups, Citizens' Advice Bureaux and the like, including groups and agencies concerned with parents from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Existing resources and networks involving youth refuges, church and welfare agencies, community education programs, and employment support groups could be assisted to develop programs available to parents and young people, providing information and strategies for dealing with change and conflict.

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Attention should also be paid to the need for socially valued roles for young people, while they are not fully occupied in the labour force. The strategies of many European countries with vast proportions of their youth population engaged in training and education are aimed at developing highly resourced training infra-structures with clear career paths and links to future employment opportunities. Young people are encouraged to regard their status as of value and are accorded more autonomy as a result.

The rights of those young people who nevertheless find themselves split from their families, require more serious attention than they have received hitherto. The rights of young people to family assets, to continued parental support and/or appropriate levels of public assistance should all be accorded similar attention to that paid to the rights of those involved in family dissolution through family law. Appropriate legal and mediatory structures should be established which will enable young people and their families to fairly resolve the outcomes of irreparable family dissolution. If sufficient attention was paid to this aspect of the problem of unsupported youth there would be less need for reliance upon the inadequate system represented by the Young Homeless Allowance which must inevitably involve arbitrary and inequitable outcomes.

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An increasing number of under 18-year-olds in Australia are homeless and for a variety of reasons are not supported financially or emotionally by their families. Some of them are still at school. This Policy Background Paper looks at the needs of such young people, critically examines Commonwealth government policies which affect them, and outlines issues which governments and the community must face if the needs of unsupported, homeless youth are to be met.

Special attention is given to the Young Homeless Allowance which, the authors argue, is too restrictive in its definition of homelessness, provides an inadequate level of income support, and relegates many young people to live in poverty.

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